SIOFA | APSOI
Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement
Accord relatif aux Pêches dans le Sud de l'Océan Indien

Scientific Committee

La Réunion, Monday 29 July 2024

SC-CIRCULAR n° 2024-10

SUBJECT: Scientific Committee Workshop to progress future protected area designation (WS2024-PAD)

Dear Heads of Delegation of the Scientific Committee,

Dear Colleagues,

As included in the SC workplan approved at MoP11, the Workshop Convener, Mr Trent Timmiss (AUS), elaborated the draft working arrangements for the upcoming Scientific Committee Workshop to Progress Future Protected Area Designation (WS2024-PAD).

The purpose of WS2024-PAD will be to further the work on the designation and evaluation of marine protected areas, and the development of a workplan to progress identification and designation of future MPAs, building on substantive work undertaken by SIOFA (SC9 report, paragraph 312). In addition, the Workshop plans to evaluate the current SIOFA interim protocol for the designation of protected areas (SC9 report, paragraph 319). The SIOFA interim protocol for the designation of protected areas is given in the SC3 report, Annex H (and reproduced as Annex 1 of this SC-Circular for your convenience).

Please find attached the draft Arrangements, Provisional Agenda and Timetable for WS2024-PAD, proposed to be held in virtual format in two sessions on the 13th and 20th November 2024 from 07.30 UTC to 11.30 UTC.

Please provide any responses on the proposed Arrangements, Provisional Agenda and Timetable to the SIOFA Science Officer (marco.milardi@siofa.org), by 12 August 2024. Following any responses, I will circulate the final Terms of References, Agenda, and Meeting Arrangements.

Sincerely yours,

Alistair Dunn

SIOFA Scientific Committee Chair

Working arrangements for the Workshop to progress future protected area designation (WS-2024-PAD)

Introduction

At SC9, the Scientific Committee proposed a workshop to progress future protected area designation (WS-2024-PAD) (SC9 Report, paragraph 312 & 319).

This workshop the workshop will be to review the protocol for future marine protected areas designation, and the development of a workplan, building on substantive work undertaken by SIOFA (SC9 report, paragraph 312). In addition, the workshop will evaluate the SIOFA interim protocol for the designation of protected areas (SC9 report, paragraph 319).

This Circular outlines the proposal for a workshop, and the proposed Terms of Reference, the Provisional Agenda, and meeting arrangements for WS-2024-PAD. The outcomes of the workshop will be presented to the 2025 meeting of the Scientific Committee.

Workshop Arrangements

The proposed workshop arrangements are:

1. The workshop is open to all representatives of the Scientific Committee and SIOFA Scientific Committee Observers.
2. The workshop will be convened by Mr Trent Timmiss (AUS).
3. The workshop will meet online via video conference (Zoom) on Wednesday 13th November 2024 and Wednesday 20th November from 07.30 UTC to 11.30 UTC.
4. A Convener's report of the workshop will be compiled by the Workshop Convener, circulated for comment to the Workshop participants, and then presented to the 2025 meeting of the Scientific Committee.

Provisional Agenda

1. Opening
    a. Welcome from Convenor
    b. Introduction of meeting participants
    c. Adoption of agenda
    d. Confirmation of meeting documents
    e. Workshop report arrangements
2. Background
    a. Basis for the current SIOFA interim protected areas
    b. SIOFA Bottom fishing footprint
    c. International Obligations and Initiatives of potential relevance
3. SIOFA Protocol for future marine protected areas designation
    a. Review Interim Protocol and criteria (SC3 report, Annex H)
    b. Application of Bioregionalisation (Paper SC-08-30)
4. Assessment of BPAs
    a. Interim BPAs
    b. Proposals for new BPAs
5. Workplan to progress identification and designation of future MPAs
    a. Draft workplan and indicative budget

6. Summary of advice to SC

Timetable

29 October 2024
Deadline for submission of any information or working papers to the workshop.

30 October 2024
Deadline for registration of participants to the workshop.

13 November 2024
First session of the workshop meetings take place virtually between 0730 and 1130 UTC. A short break will be scheduled at about 0930 UTC.

20 November 2024
Second session of the workshop meetings take place virtually between 0730 and 1130 UTC. A short break will be scheduled at about 0930 UTC.

29 November 2024
Distribution of draft Workshop Conveners Report for comment by participants.

15 February 2024
Final Workshop Conveners Report submitted to SC10.

Annex 1: SIOFA Standard protocol for future protected areas designation (reproduced from SC3 report, Annex H)

PROCESS FOR PROPOSAL AND REVIEW

As described in the terms of reference for the Protected Areas and Ecosystems working group (PAEWG, SC3 Report Annex I)

CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING PROTECTED AREA PROPOSALS

1. The objective/s for the protected area is clearly stated and the proposal clearly demonstrates which of the criteria are met.

The proposal should then state which of the following criteria meet the objectives with "the list below having no particular ranking of importance".

2. VMEs are known to occur and/or triggering of VME indicator thresholds reported for the area proposed

    a. Closure may be warranted if there are known or consistent triggering of VME indicator thresholds of CPs, indicating potential VME.

3. Bioregional representation

    a. Area is known to contain unique, rare or distinct, habitats or ecosystems that fishing operations will disturb.
    b. Area with a comparatively higher degree of naturalness due to zero or a low level of human-induced disturbance or degradation from, for example, historical fishing activity.

4. Geographic and/or geomorphological representation

    a. The area provides for important or desirable geographic representation within the SIOFA area
    b. The area proposed is known to contain unique or unusual geomorphological features that fishing operations may damage.

5. Biodiversity representation

    a. The area is known to contain unique or rare (occurring in only a few locations) species, populations or communities.
    b. The area is known to contain a high diversity of ecosystems, habitats, communities, or species, or has higher genetic diversity.
    c. The area is known to contain a relatively high proportion of sensitive habitats, biotopes or species that are functionally fragile (highly susceptible to degradation or depletion by human activity or by natural events) or with slow recovery.

6. Scientific interest

    a. The area has scientific research interest associated with understanding ecosystem, biological, geological and biodiversity processes in the SIOFA region.

7. Areas of special significance for threatened or important species or ecosystem properties

    a. There is evidence that the area is of special importance for life history stages of species and/or threatened species.

b. There is evidence that the area contains habitat for the survival and recovery of endangered, threatened, declining species or is an area with significant assemblages of such species.

Other principles to be considered in formulating recommendations for protected areas

8. Best available information should be used to support protected area proposals and designation. This information should be sufficiently substantiated and/or verified (and preferably provided), for example through the referencing of available literature/research. Mechanisms such as statements and observation made by skippers and crew could be used as supporting information to scientific validated data. In the absence of information, a precautionary approach should be applied.

a. Recommendations must be informed by the available information. Best available information should include ecological, environmental, social, cultural and economic aspects of the marine environment that is available without unreasonable cost, effort or loss of timeliness.
b. Recommendations to implement spatial management measures should not be postponed because of a lack of full scientific certainty, especially where significant or irreversible damage to ecosystems could occur or indigenous species are at risk of extinction.

9. Adverse impacts on existing users should be evaluated.

a. Where there is a choice of several sites, which if protected would add a similar ecosystem or habitat to the closure network, and only one, or some of the sites are to be closed, the site(s) recommended should minimise adverse impacts on existing users. Where there is a choice to be made among minimum impact sites, selection may also be guided by:
   i ease of management and enforcement; and
   ii if there are other benefits such as education or eco-tourism.

10. The rationale used to recommend spatial management measures should be consistent and transparent.

11. There should be an evaluation of existing closures when making recommendations and explanation as to how a new management measure will assist in achieving MoP objectives.

a. An enumeration of spatial management measures should be prepared to assess progress towards achieving the policies.

Considerations for determining boundaries of protected areas

12. Dimensions of the area

a. The recommended area should, as far as practicable, include continuous and contiguous depth.
b. Area designation should be based on seafloor features such as geomorphic features
c. Size and shape should be orientated to account for inclusion of connectivity corridors and biological dispersal patterns within and across closures.
   i Where this is unavailable, protected area proposal and designation may consider linkages with adjacent protected areas, or research from other oceans to inform inferences on biological dispersal patterns.
d. Boundary lines should be simple, as much as possible following straight latitudinal/longitudinal lines and, where possible, coinciding with existing regulatory boundaries.
e. The size and shape of each area should be set to minimise socio-economic costs.

GUIDANCE FOR SC RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE MEETING OF THE PARTIES

The SC should make a recommendation to the MoP based on how the proposal satisfies one or more of the criteria of the protocol.

If the scientific evidence to support protecting area using the protocol is uncertain or insufficient, more data may be required.

If the proposal documents the necessary data and scientific information to support a protected area using protocol, different measures could be applied, such as management measures, technical measures, closures.

In case of an area becoming protected, a management and research plan shall be associated to it on the year to come. It will include:

- The measures in place in the protected area;
- The time of review of the protected area;
- If needed, the research that should be undertaken in the area. To this end, the parties should consider to ask for international funds.

SIOFA PROTECTED AREAS PROPOSALS AND DESIGNATION TEMPLATE

Name	*This field will contain the name of the proposed protected area*
Details of the proponent/s	*This field should contain details of the proponent/s*
Geographic description	*This field should contain the coordinates of the proposed area's spatial boundaries. It may also contain maps showing the spatial area and/or bathymetry, or other spatial information of relevance to the proposal*
Objectives	*This field will explicitly detail the objective/s that designation of the proposed protected area would address (i.e., the primary reason/s for protection)*
Criteria that the protected area meets	*This field would contain the specific criteria that the protected area meets, structured against the SIOFA Standard protocol for protected areas designation. This field will also contain evidence in support of each criteria that the area meets. This evidence may include, but is not limited to:* *-Information from scientific or other surveys* *-References to peer-reviewed literature* *-Photographs, graphs and figures supporting the proposal* *-Fishing data analysis to support the proposal* *-Appropriately substantiated reports and/or statements from skippers or observers to justify the proposal.*
Social, cultural and economic interests	*This section would consider existing fisheries interests and possible adverse impacts of Protected Area designation on those interests. This section may also consider potential future interests. Any social or cultural interests or values should also be included. This section should be backed up by data, formal statements and references in the literature.*
Risks to the proposed area	*This section should contain detailed information on the scope of the Protected Area designation in terms of what activities would be restricted or prohibited. If the proposal is that some activities are restricted, this section should contain information on how these activities will be monitored.*
Review periods	*This section should contain an anticipated review period to review whether the Protected Area is achieving its*

	objectives, including consideration of whether any new information has become available that may enhance or degrade the justification for protection.
Outline of monitoring and/or research needed	*This section will contain an outline of monitoring and/or research needed to maintain, update or review the Protected Area.*