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# Sri Lanka's Fisheries Sector and Interest in Cooperation with the Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement (SIOFA)

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<b>Abstract</b>	
<p>Sri Lanka is a maritime nation with a well-developed offshore and deep-sea fisheries sector comprising approximately 5,000 multi-day fishing vessels. Of these, around 2,050 vessels seasonally target Indian scads (<i>Decapterus</i> spp.) and other small pelagic species using ring nets. This fishery has become an important component of Sri Lanka's offshore fishing industry, contributing significantly to livelihoods, food security, and fish production. It is estimated that approximately 410 of these vessels operated within the Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement (SIOFA) Convention Area during 2025. As the primary target species of these vessels are not generally managed under the mandate of the Indian Ocean</p>	

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Tuna Commission (IOTC), Sri Lanka recognizes the importance of engaging with the regional fisheries management framework established by SIOFA. Such engagement would facilitate scientific cooperation, data sharing, monitoring and compliance, and contribute to the sustainable management of fisheries resources in the southern Indian Ocean. This information paper provides an overview of Sri Lanka's relevant fisheries activities and outlines the country's interest in strengthening cooperation with SIOFA.

## **1. Introduction**

Sri Lanka is an island nation located in the northern Indian Ocean with a long history of marine fisheries. The fisheries sector contributes significantly to food security, employment, livelihoods, export earnings, and the national economy. The sector supports over 600,000 people directly and indirectly and plays a vital role in sustaining coastal communities throughout the country.

Sri Lanka is committed to the sustainable utilization and conservation of marine living resources through science-based fisheries management, effective monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) measures, and active participation in regional fisheries governance mechanisms.

## **2. Sri Lanka's Marine Fisheries Sector**

Sri Lanka's fisheries sector plays a significant role in national food security, employment, livelihoods, and export earnings. The marine fisheries sector comprises coastal, offshore, and deep-sea fisheries operating throughout the Indian Ocean.

The Sri Lankan fishing fleet includes approximately 5,000 multi-day fishing vessels engaged in offshore and deep-sea fishing activities, in addition to a large number of coastal and small-scale fishing craft. These vessels target a variety of fishery resources including tuna, tuna-like species, small pelagic species, sharks, and other oceanic resources.

Sri Lanka has established comprehensive fisheries management systems including vessel registration and licensing, vessel monitoring systems (VMS), fisheries data collection programmes, observer schemes, and electronic fisheries management platforms to support sustainable fisheries management and compliance with national and international obligations.

## **3. Ring Net Fishery and Operations in the SIOFA Area**

Among Sri Lanka's multi-day fishing fleet, approximately 2,050 vessels seasonally target Indian scads (*Decapterus* spp.) and associated small pelagic species using a fishing method commonly known as the ring net fishery.

The ring net fishery has expanded over the past decade and now represents an important component of Sri Lanka's offshore fishing sector. These vessels undertake extended fishing trips and operate in offshore waters beyond Sri Lanka's Exclusive Economic Zone.

It is estimated that approximately 410 Sri Lankan ring-net vessels operated in the SIOFA Convention Area during 2024/25. The primary target species of these vessels are Indian scads and other small pelagic resources rather than tuna and tuna-like species managed by the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC).

## **4. Sri Lanka's Participation in Regional Fisheries Management**

Sri Lanka is an active Contracting Party to the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) and participates actively in scientific, compliance, and management processes of the Commission.

Sri Lanka maintains robust reporting systems, fisheries data collection programmes, vessel monitoring arrangements, and management measures to meet its obligations under IOTC.

While Sri Lanka's offshore fishing fleet includes vessels operating in areas under the competence of IOTC, a substantial number of ring-net vessels operating in the southern Indian Ocean are not targeting species managed by IOTC. Consequently, the management and oversight of these fishing activities would benefit from closer engagement with the regional fisheries management arrangements applicable to the SIOFA Convention Area.

## **5. Interest in Cooperation with SIOFA**

Recognizing the importance of sustainable fisheries management and responsible fishing practices in the southern Indian Ocean, Sri Lanka is exploring opportunities to strengthen cooperation with SIOFA.

Sri Lanka considers that engagement with SIOFA would enhance regional cooperation for the sustainable management of fisheries resources in the southern Indian Ocean, improve understanding of fishing activities conducted by Sri Lankan vessels within the SIOFA Convention Area, facilitate scientific collaboration and data sharing, strengthen monitoring, compliance and reporting mechanisms, support ecosystem-based fisheries management and conservation objectives, and promote responsible fishing practices consistent with international fisheries instruments and obligations. Through closer cooperation with SIOFA, Sri Lanka aims to contribute to the long-term sustainability, transparency, and effective governance of fisheries resources in the southern Indian Ocean.

Sri Lanka looks forward to constructive engagement with SIOFA Members and Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties to contribute to the sustainable management of fisheries resources in the southern Indian Ocean.

## **6. Conclusion**

Sri Lanka remains committed to the principles of sustainable fisheries management, international cooperation, and science-based decision-making. Given the presence of a significant ring-net fishing fleet operating within the SIOFA Area and targeting species outside the mandate of IOTC, Sri Lanka considers engagement with SIOFA to be an important step towards ensuring effective governance, transparency, and sustainability of these fishing activities.

Sri Lanka welcomes further dialogue with SIOFA Members regarding appropriate mechanisms for cooperation and participation in the Agreement.