

Updates on SIOFA activities since 2019 relevant to the UN SG Report

Identifying vulnerable marine ecosystems and assessing the significant adverse impact of bottom fishing

SIOFA has progressed in a VME mapping and bioregionalization effort that is scheduled to end in 2023, identifying ecoregions within the SIOFA area based on key ecological data and distribution of VME indicator taxa. More work is underway to improve the scientific knowledge needed to manage SAIs of bottom fishing on VMEs.

A preliminary assessment of the impacts of bottom fishing has been carried out for relevant CCPs in 2020 and for the Saya del Malha bank area in 2022. With a wider scope, a first level risk assessment for bottom fisheries was also conducted for sharks and seabirds.

Adopting and implementing conservation and management measures, including the development of protocols for encounters with vulnerable marine ecosystems

SIOFA has adopted CMM 2020/01 (Conservation and Management Measure for the Interim Management of Bottom Fishing in the Agreement Area (Interim Management of Bottom Fishing) with the objective to promote the sustainable management of deep-sea fisheries resources in the Agreement Area, including target fish stocks and non-target species, and to protect the marine ecosystem, including, inter alia, the prevention of significant adverse impacts on vulnerable marine ecosystems.

This CMM contains provisions for CCPs to limit their bottom fishing effort and/or catch, constrain the spatial distribution of their bottom fishing effort, establish threshold levels for encounters with VMEs (and relative move-on rules), and restrict fishing in any areas that the Meeting of the Parties has decided to close (5 Interim Protected Areas).

It is relevant to note that this CMM asks to develop a SIOFA Bottom Fishing Impact Assessment Standard (BFIAS) which are made publicly available on the SIOFA website, maps of known VMEs in the SIOFA area, a standard protocol to designate protected areas and guidelines for evaluating and approving electronic observer programs for scientific data collection.

In 2019, SIOFA had adopted conservation and management measures 2019/13 and 2019/15 for mitigation of seabirds bycatch and management of demersal stocks. CMM 2019/13 provide for sustainable technologies and practices to mitigate the risk of seabird interactions and CMM 2019/15 provisions to limit catch and effort of the main target stocks (orange roughy, alfonsino and toothfish) until the SIOFA Scientific Committee has developed more specific advice for the Meeting of the Parties.

Closing areas containing vulnerable marine ecosystems to bottom fishing until conservation and management measures are adopted

SIOFA has elected 5 Interim Protected Areas under CMM 2020/01 (Annex 3), where bottom fishing is not allowed, excluding line and trap methods. Further work is being prepared to inform the adoption of a dedicated research and management plans.

Establishing mechanisms to promote and enhance compliance with applicable measures

SIOFA CCPs are required to ensure that any vessels flying their flags and undertaking bottom fishing had a certain percentage of scientific observer coverage, depending on the gear used, and that they submitted vessel monitoring system reports in electronic format to the SIOFA Secretariat, in accordance with conservation and management measures adopted by the SIOFA Meeting of the Parties.

The Compliance Committee is entitled to assess the CCPs compliance with all adopted measures through the SIOFA Compliance Monitoring Scheme (CMM 2020/11) and review CMMs. It provides recommendations to the SIOFA Meeting of the Parties.

Review of identifications, assessments and measures

The Scientific Committee is required to provide advice and recommendations to the SIOFA Meeting of the Parties whenever a substantial change in the fishery occurs or new data warrants changes in the measures. Both a teleost and a chondrichthyan first level risk assessment were carried out in SIOFA and will be updated as new information becomes available. Further work has also been advanced on establishing a footprint for bottom fisheries in the SIOFA area, which the MoP can consider when managing bottom fisheries impacts.

Other impacts than bottom fishing (ref. General Assembly resolution 71/123 184-185)

Other impacts on VMEs than bottom fishing have not yet been considered in SIOFA.

Exchanging best practices and developing regional standards (paragraph 122 (a) of resolution 64/72)

Developing or strengthening data-collection standards, procedures and protocols and research programmes (paragraph 123 of resolution 64/72)

CCAMLR and SIOFA developed a joint tagging protocol and a protocol for data exchange on toothfish.

Making assessments and adopted measures publicly available (paragraph 122 (b) of resolution 64/72 and paragraph 130 of resolution 66/68)

All SIOFA adopted measures and most assessments are published on the SIOFA website and are accessible to the public. Further measures have been recommended by the SIOFA SC to improve the dissemination of restricted documents to a larger audience.

Submission to FAO by flag States of lists of authorized vessels and relevant adopted measures (paragraph 122 (c) of resolution 64/72)

This resolution seems to require the flag states to send their list of authorized vessels to FAO. However, SIOFA publishes an up-to-date list of authorized vessels by flag state on its website and it is available to the public (<https://apsoi.org/mcs/authorised-vessels>).

Sharing information on vessels engaged in bottom fishing where the flag State responsible cannot be determined (paragraph 122 (d) of resolution 64/72)

When a vessel is fishing in the Agreement Area and its flag cannot be determined, it falls under CMM 2016/04 (vessels without nationality). It is also considered IUU and would be entitled to follow the SIOFA IUU listing process described in CMM 2018/06 (IUU vessel list). The IUU vessel list is publicly available on the SIOFA website.

Activities of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

SIOFA has committed to contribute to both the FAO ABNJ project and the Fisheries and Resources Monitoring System (FIRMS).