

SIOFA Standard protocol for future protected areas designation

- Compile the available information regarding incidental by-catch of VME indicator species and respective habitats within SIOFA CA including from:
 - Fishery dependent data;
 - Survey and research data;
 - Other sources of information.
- Make available the data for the proposed area.
- Adopt the FAO guidelines to identify VME habitats and define the criteria for identifying protected areas designation.
- SIOFA SC will recommend future protected areas on the basis of the standard criteria.

Rationale the SC should consider when making recommendations to the MoP on any protected area proposal

1. VME encounter reported for the area proposed
 - a. Closure may be warranted if there is consistent triggering of VME move-on rules, indicating potential VME.
2. Bioregional representation
 - a. Area is known to contain unique, rare or distinct habitats or ecosystems that fishing operations will disturb and that are deemed to be desirable and acceptable.
 - b. Area is known to contain unique, rare or distinct, habitats or ecosystems that bottom fishing operations will disturb.
 - c. Area with a comparatively higher degree of naturalness because of the lack of or low level of human-induced disturbance or degradation, as an example considering historical fishing activities.
3. Geographic and/or unique representation
 - a. The area proposed is known to contain unique or unusual geomorphological features that fishing operations may damage.
4. Biodiversity representation
 - a. The area is known to contain unique, rare (occurs only in few locations) species, populations or communities,
 - b. The area is known to contain 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.
5. Scientific Interest
 - a. The area, excluding existing fishing grounds, has a history of scientific research associated with understanding ecosystem and biodiversity processes in the SIOFA region and fishing activities would compromise current and future research.

6. Ecosystem hotspot, threatened species
 - a. There is substantive evidence that the area is of special importance for life history stages of species and/or threatened species. E.g. An area containing habitat for the survival and recovery of endangered, threatened, declining species or area with significant assemblages of such species.

Other considerations for determining boundaries of protected areas

Dimensions of the Area

- b. The recommended area should, as far as practicable, include continuous depth.
- c. Area designation should be based on seafloor features such as geomorphic features
- d. Size and shape should be orientated to account for inclusion of connectivity corridors and biological dispersal patterns within and across closures.
- e. Boundary lines should be simple, as much as possible following straight latitudinal/longitudinal lines.
- f. Boundary lines should be as simple, as possible. E.g., where possible coinciding with existing regulatory boundaries.
- g. The size and shape of each area should be set to minimise socio-economic costs.

Other principles to be considered in formulating recommendations for fishing closures

7. All available information should be considered in decision-making and the precautionary principle applied.
 - a. Recommendations must be informed by the available information. All 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.
8. 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:
 - (a) ease of management and enforcement; and (b) if there are other benefits such as education or eco-tourism
9. The rationale used to recommend spatial management measures should be consistent.
10. 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.

Next steps

11. The SC has agreed to these draft criteria for recommending protected areas.
12. Create a dedicated Working group within SIOFA SC to analyse the information and prepare a report to be considered by SIOFA SC meeting (at least 30 days before the meeting)
13. The SC will review these criteria after the first submission of a working paper proposing a protected area recommendation. The criteria will be revised accordingly and agreed as criteria for recommending protected areas.
14. The SC will continue to revise the criteria on an ad-hoc basis thereafter under the principle of continuous improvement.