

9th MEETING OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

Held virtually, 27 September to 2 October 2021

SC9-DW03 rev1

Template for a SPRFMO Fisheries Operation Plan

Scientific Committee

1. Background

SC8 requested ([SC8-Report](#) Paragraph 208) that interested parties work intersessionally to update the checklist for Exploratory Fisheries Proposals with additional detail in accordance with CMM 13-2021 (Exploratory Fisheries) and based on their experience of reviewing exploratory fishing proposals in recent years. On a potential need to develop a template for Fisheries Operation Plans to assist proponents to meet the requirements of CMM 13-2021 (Exploratory Fisheries), the SC also requested the Secretariat to work with Members intersessionally to develop such a template.

This document contains a draft schema for the provision of Exploratory Fisheries Proposals, consisting of five parts:

1. The SUCCINCT DESCRIPTION required by Paragraph 5 of CMM 13-2021 (120 days before the SC).
2. The FISHERIES OPERATION PLAN required by Paragraph 5 of CMM 13-2021 (60 days before the SC).
3. The INPUT INTO SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE CONSIDERATIONS required by Paragraphs 9 and 10 of CMM 13-2021.
4. The DATA COLLECTION PLAN required by Paragraphs 11 and 12 of CMM 13-2021.
5. A SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST AND RECOMMENDATIONS (for the SC to complete)

The draft schema contains only the details specified in CMM 13-2021. As requested by SC8, Members are invited to suggest additional detail, based on their experience of reviewing exploratory fishing proposals in recent years.

The Cook Islands suggested adding a new section called “Overlapping fisheries” which would include information on any overlapping fisheries. This would include information on any fisheries operating in the same area with the same gear in the previous 10 years. This should outline any agreed co-operation with other SPRFMO Members or CNCPs. The SC asked that this be broadened to extend to overlapping fisheries both current and planned.

The SC agreed that this template will be a useful tool for developing Fisheries Operations Plans in future, and it was accepted by the SC.

1. SUCCINCT DESCRIPTION

Paragraph 5 of CMM13 requires any Member or CNCP seeking to permit a vessel that flies its flag to fish in an exploratory fishery, or to fish in an exploratory fishery with a gear type that has not been used in that fishery for the previous ten years to submit no less than 120 days prior to the next annual meeting of the Scientific Committee a succinct description of their intended Fisheries Operation Plan for information purposes.

Member/CNCP	
Area	
Target Species	
Proposed Methods of fishing	
Proposed maximum catch limit	
Expected operation period	
Submission date	

2. FISHERIES OPERATION PLAN

Paragraph 5 of CMM13 requires a full Fisheries Operation Plan to be submitted not less than 60 days in advance of the next annual meeting of the Scientific Committee. The Fisheries Operation Plan should include the following information (to the extent it is available):

2.1 Description

A description of the exploratory fishery, including area, target species, proposed methods of fishing, proposed maximum catch limits and any apportionment of that catch limit among areas or species.

[Add your text here]

2.2 Fishing gear

Specification and full description of the types of fishing gear to be used, including any modifications made to gear intended to mitigate the effects of the proposed fishing on non-target and associated or dependent species or the marine ecosystem in which the fishery occurs.

[Add your text here]

2.3 Time period

The time period the Fisheries Operation Plan covers (up to a maximum period of three years).

[Add your text here]

2.4 Biological information

Any biological information on the target species from comprehensive research and/or survey cruises, such as distribution, abundance, demographic data and information on stock identity.

[Add your text here]

2.5 Non-target and associated or dependent species

Details of non-target and associated or dependent species and the marine ecosystem in which the fishery occurs, the extent to which these would be likely to be affected by the proposed fishing activity and any measures that will be taken to mitigate these effects.

[Add your text here]

2.6 Cumulative impact of all fishing activity

The anticipated cumulative impact of all fishing activity in the area of the exploratory fishery if applicable.

[Add your text here]

2.7 Similar fisheries

Information from other fisheries in the region or similar fisheries elsewhere that may assist in the evaluation of the relevant exploratory fishery's potential yield, to the extent the Member or CNCP is able to provide this information.

[Add your text here]

2.7 (bis) Overlapping fisheries

Information on any overlapping fisheries, current or planned, including information on any fisheries operating in the same area with the same gear in the previous 10 years. This should outline any agreed co-operation with other SPRFMO Members or CNCPs.

[Add your text here]

2.8 Bottom fishing (if applicable)

If the proposed fishing activity is bottom fishing, as defined in CMM 03 (Bottom Fishing), the assessment of the impact of their flagged vessels' bottom fishing activities, prepared pursuant to paragraph 21(a) of CMM 03 (Bottom Fishing).

[Add your text here]

2.9 Adjacent RFMO (or similar) fishery

Where the target species is also managed by an adjacent Regional Fisheries Management Organisation or similar organisation, a description of that neighbouring fishery sufficient to allow the Scientific Committee to formulate its advice in accordance with paragraph 10 of CMM 13.

[Add your text here]

3. INPUT INTO SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE CONSIDERATIONS

Paragraphs 9 and 10 of CMM13 require the Scientific Committee to consider all Fisheries Operations Plans submitted, all information provided in accordance with a Data Collection Plan and any other relevant information, and to provide recommendations and advice to the Commission on each Fisheries Operation Plan on a number of matters. To assist the Scientific Committee in its work, the proponent is requested to indicate what they consider to be an appropriate assessment or recommendation from the Scientific Committee to address each of the Scientific Committee Considerations.

3.1 Management strategies or plans for fishery resources

The SC has previously interpreted this as a clear objective for the fishery.

[Add your text here]

3.2 Reference points

This should include precautionary reference points as described in Annex II of the 1995 agreement. SC6 suggested (Paragraph 236 of [SC6-Report](#)) that the assumptions underlying how biomass estimates are determined should be clearly described in the proposal.

[Add your text here]

3.3 An appropriate precautionary catch limit

SC5 suggested (Paragraph 56 of the [SC5 Report](#)) that a literature review of exploitation rates, stock assessment mechanisms and precautionary measures that are used in other similar fisheries would help to contextualise whether a potential catch limit was appropriate as a precautionary fishery.

[Add your text here]

3.4 The cumulative impacts of all fishing activities in the area of the exploratory fishery

The 2019 SPRFMO Bottom Fishing Impact Assessment Standard (BFIAS) includes “Cumulative impact” as one of the criteria for a risk assessment for benthic habitats, biodiversity and VMEs and notes that the frequency of the impact will influence the risk, with activities occurring repeatedly at a site likely to have a greater risk. This will depend on the amount of fishing effort and should be considered in relation to the recovery of the VMEs/taxa (Section 1.3.5 of the 2019 [BFIAS](#)).

[Add your text here]

3.5 The impact of the proposed fishing on the marine ecosystem

SC6 (Paragraph 228 of the [SC6 Report](#)) suggested that a risk assessment might be prepared to better allow the likelihood and consequences of bycatch interactions to be evaluated and the adequacy of proposed avoidance and mitigation measures in the proposal to be assessed.

[Add your text here]

3.6 Sufficiency of information available and degree of certainty

This is an assessment of whether there is enough information available to inform the level of precaution required and also an evaluation of the level of uncertainty in the provision of advice.

[Add your text here]

3.7 Consistency with nature as an exploratory fishery

This is the degree to which the approach outlined in the Fisheries Operation Plan is likely to ensure the exploratory fishery is developed consistently with its nature as an exploratory fishery.

SC5 suggested (Paragraph 59-60 of the [SC5 Report](#)) a phased approach to the development of an exploratory fishery, for example including:

Phase 1:

- *Wide area surveys to understand distribution, relative abundance and/or density estimates for features*
- *Biological information collection (length information, sex ratio, maturity information etc.)*
- *VME monitoring – potential use of cameras, identification of all benthic organisms, return to land of anything unidentifiable, possible bathymetric data collection*
- *Bycatch data collection - species identification, length data, otolith collection of main species*

Phase 2:

- *Design and implementation of depletion experiment(s) in identified area(s) (e.g. for a sedentary species)*

Phase 3:

- *Work towards stock differentiation and stock assessment (including longer term yield estimates)*

But noted that elements of each phase could occur simultaneously.

[Add your text here]

3.8 Consistency with Objective of the Convention

This is the degree to which the approach outlined in the Fisheries Operation Plan is likely to ensure that the exploratory fishery is developed consistently with the objectives of Article 2 of the [Convention](#) (the Objective).

This should address the following elements from the Objective:

- *through the application of the precautionary approach and*
- *an ecosystem approach to fisheries management,*
- *to ensure the long-term conservation and sustainable use of fishery resources and,*
- *in so doing, to safeguard the marine ecosystems in which these resources occur.*

[Add your text here]

3.9 Bottom Fishing advice and recommendations

SC7 noted (Paragraph 342 [SC7-Report](#)) that it is a requirement of CMM 13 that if the proposed fishing activity is bottom fishing, then an assessment of the possible impact needs to be done. In respect of a Fisheries Operation Plan that proposes any bottom fishing activity, this section should include any advice and recommendations in accordance with paragraph 21 (b) of CMM 03 (Bottom Fishing), i.e. on whether the proposed bottom fishing would contribute to having significant adverse impacts on deep sea fish stocks for which no stock assessment has been completed, bycatch species and/or VMEs and if so whether any proposed or additional mitigation measures would prevent such impacts.

The 2019 SPRFMO Bottom Fishing Impact Assessment Standard ([BFIAS](#)) provides a standard for a Bottom Fishing Impact Assessment in SPRFMO.

[Add your text here]

4. DATA COLLECTION PLAN

Paragraph 11 of CMM13 also requires the Scientific Committee to develop a Data Collection Plan in respect of the exploratory fishery which should include research requirements, as appropriate. The Data Collection Plan should identify and describe the data needed and any operational research actions necessary to obtain data from the exploratory fishery to enable an assessment of the stock, the feasibility of establishing a fishery and the impact of fishing activity on non-target, associated or dependent species and the marine ecosystem in which the fishery occurs, and under Paragraph 12 require, as appropriate. To assist the Scientific Committee in its work, the proponent is requested to indicate what they consider to be an appropriate assessment or recommendation from the Scientific Committee to address each of the Scientific Committee Considerations with regards to the Data Collection Plan.

4.1 Data required

A description of the catch, effort and related biological, ecological and environmental data required to undertake the evaluations described in paragraph 26 of CMM 13, i.e. to allow the Commission to take a decision to manage the fishery as an established fishery.

[Add your text here]

4.2 Due dates

The dates by which this data must be provided to the Commission.

[Add your text here]

4.3 A plan for directing fishing effort

A plan for directing fishing effort in the exploratory fishery to allow for the acquisition of relevant data to evaluate the fishery potential and the ecological relationships among harvested, non-target and associated and dependent populations and the likelihood of adverse impact.

[Add your text here]

4.4 Other research data (where appropriate)

Where appropriate, a plan for the acquisition of any other research data obtained by fishing vessels, including activities that may require the cooperative activities of scientific observers and the vessel, as may be required by the Scientific Committee to evaluate the fishery potential and the ecological relationships among harvested, non-target, associated and dependent populations and the likelihood of adverse impacts.

[Add your text here]

4.5 Time scales

An evaluation of the time scales involved in determining the responses of harvested, dependent and related populations to fishing activities.

SC5 (Paragraph 59-60 of the [SC5 Report](#)) suggested that this could include a plan for how the information collected will lead to assessment and eventual management of the stocks.

[Add your text here]

5. SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This checklist is for the Scientific Committee to complete to ensure that all aspects of the Fisheries Operation Plan and the Data Collection Plan have been assessed. To assist the Scientific Committee with their deliberations, please pre-fill the Rationale column with a brief justification of how your Fisheries Operation Plan and Data Collection Plan address the Scientific Committee consideration. The Scientific Committee will complete the Assessment column.

5.1 Fisheries Operation Plan checklist

Fisheries Operation Plan Considerations	Rationale	Assessment
<i>a) management strategies or plans for fishery resources; [Note that SC has previously interpreted this as to mean as having a clear objective for the fishery]</i>		
<i>b) reference points, including precautionary reference points as described in Annex II of the 1995 Agreement;</i>		
<i>c) an appropriate precautionary catch limit;</i>		
<i>d) the cumulative impacts of all fishing activity in the area of the exploratory fishery;</i>		
<i>e) the impact of the proposed fishing on the marine ecosystem;</i>		
<i>f) the sufficiency of information available to inform the level of precaution required and the degree of certainty with which the Scientific Committee's advice is provided;</i>		
<i>g) the degree to which the approach outlined in the Fisheries Operation Plan is likely to ensure the exploratory fishery is developed consistently with its nature as an exploratory fishery, and consistently with the objectives of Article 2 of the Convention¹; and</i>		
<i>h) in respect of a Fisheries Operation Plan that proposes any bottom fishing activity, advice and recommendations in accordance with paragraph 20 (b) of CMM 03-2020 (Bottom Fishing)².</i>		

¹ The objective of this Convention is, through the application of the precautionary approach and an ecosystem approach to fisheries management, to ensure the long-term conservation and sustainable use of fishery resources and, in so doing, to safeguard the marine ecosystems in which these resources occur.

² The Scientific Committee shall undertake a review of the proposed assessment and provide advice to the Commission on:

- i. whether the proposed bottom fishing would contribute to having significant adverse impacts on deep sea fish stocks for which no stock assessment has been completed, bycatch species and/or VMEs and, if so,
- ii. whether any proposed or additional mitigation measures would prevent such impacts.

5.2 Data Collection Plan checklist

Data Collection Plan considerations	Rationale	Assessment
<p><i>a) a description of the catch, effort and related biological, ecological and environmental data required to undertake the evaluations described in paragraph 24;</i></p>		
<p><i>b) the dates by which the data must be provided to the Commission;</i></p>		
<p><i>c) a plan for directing fishing effort in an exploratory fishery to allow for the acquisition of relevant data to evaluate the fishery potential and the ecological relationships among harvested, non-target and associated and dependent populations and the likelihood of adverse impact;</i></p>		
<p><i>d) where appropriate, a plan for the acquisition of any other research data obtained by fishing vessels, including activities that may require the cooperative activities of scientific observers and the vessel, as may be required by the Scientific Committee to evaluate the fishery potential and the ecological relationships among harvested, non-target, associated and dependent populations and the likelihood of adverse impacts; and</i></p>		
<p><i>e) an evaluation of the time scales involved in determining the responses of harvested, dependent and related populations to fishing activities</i></p> <p>[Note that SC has previously interpreted this as to mean “when will data be analysed and available”]</p>		

5.3 Scientific Committee recommendations (SC to complete)

The SC discussed the [insert Member/CNCP] Fisheries Operational Plan and Data Collection plan and **Agreed** that the approach outlined in the Fisheries Operation Plan is likely to ensure that the exploratory fishery is developed consistently with its nature as an exploratory fishery, and consistently with the objectives of Article 2 of the Convention, with the following requested modifications (*to be added if necessary*):

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Or:

The SC discussed the [insert Member/CNCP] Fisheries Operational Plan and Data Collection plan and **recommended** that a small working group [led by xxx and composed of xxx] meet post SC and to provide additional advice on the proposal, noting that the work is likely to extend intersessionally and would be expected to result in a revised proposal being provided to the next meeting of the Scientific Committee. Aspects of the proposal which are currently deficient include

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-
-

Or:

The SC discussed the [insert Member/CNCP] Fisheries Operational Plan and Data Collection plan and **agreed** that the proposal was lacking critical information in several important areas and was not consistent with the SPRFMO objective. The SC noted that the Fisheries Operational Plan in its current form would require substantive modification to ensure that sufficient information would be available to enable the SC to evaluate the long-term potential and impacts, of the proposed exploratory fishery, and to ensure that the fishery resources would be developed on a precautionary and gradual basis a required by the CMM.