

**COMM 6 - Doc 07\_rev1**

**Summary report of the Scientific Committee's Intersessional meeting on the  
Cook Islands exploratory fishing proposal**

*Scientific Committee*

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**DEVELOPMENT OF THE ADVICE**

The Cook Islands has recently put forward a proposal to conduct exploratory fishing in the SPRFMO Area ([COMM6-Prop03\\_rev1](#)). The proposal is to be considered by the Commission at its upcoming meeting in Lima, Peru. This paper contains the SPRFMO Scientific Committee advice that was developed after considering the most recently submitted Fisheries Operation Plan ([COMM6-Info7](#)).

A history of the process in relation to this proposal is as follows.

On 3 Aug 2017, as required by [CMM 13-2016](#) (Exploratory Fisheries), the Cook Islands submitted an initial Fisheries Operation Plan to the Scientific Committee's Shanghai meeting in China. The plan to conduct Exploratory Fishing in the SPRFMO Area and target deep-water species of lobster and crab was revised on 21 September ([SC5-DW01\\_rev1](#)). The Scientific Committee considered the initial plan during SC5 and produced the following advice ([paragraph 65 of the SC5 report](#)):

*65. On considering the advice from the SC against the specific requirements of the exploratory fishing CMM, and the overarching intent of the CMM to develop new fisheries in a gradual and precautionary manner, the SC:*

- ***Indicated*** that it could not support the proposal in its current form
- ***Agreed*** that it could consider a revised proposal that provides more information on how the data collected through a gradual development of the fishery could be used to assess and manage the stocks appropriately
- ***Noted*** that work could be undertaken intersessionally to assist Cook Islands to revise the proposal
- ***Noted*** that a potential phased approach to developing this fishery would help towards understanding the viability and for collecting the data necessary to ensure the sustainability of future catches
- ***Noted*** that such a phased approach would need to include mechanisms for review of the data being collected
- ***Noted*** that a revised proposal should include a better definition of objectives and a more explicit data collection plan.

In response to the SC's advice, the Cook Islands produced a revised Fisheries Operation Plan ([COMM6-Info7](#)) and requested that the SC meet intersessionally to consider the revised plan (circulated 10 November). Subsequently, on 4 December, the SC held an intersessional web meeting to consider the revised plan and afterward produced draft advice relating to the activity.

On 12 December, the Cook Islands submitted a proposal for a CMM on Exploratory Pot Fishing in the SPRFMO Area ([COMM6-Prop03\\_rev1](#)).

On 15 December, the SC Chair (Dr. James Ianelli) circulated the completed draft advice to the entire Scientific Committee and requested that the SC take an intersessional decision following the procedure described in paragraphs 6 to 11 of Rule 7 of the Rules of Procedure of the SPRFMO Commission.

The intersessional decision procedure was completed on 15 January 2018 and the SC's final advice relating to the proposed exploratory fishing activity was adopted by consensus (Annex 1). Eight members responded positively. Australia, China, Cook Islands, Cuba, Ecuador, Faroe Islands and Chinese Taipei did not participate in the decision (Rule of Procedure 7, paragraph 10). Two members (Chile and New Zealand), while agreeing to the advice, also asked that their views be included and made available to the Commission (Annex 2).

## Summary report **of the Scientific Committee's** Intersessional meeting on the Cook Islands exploratory fishing proposal

A subset (herein group) of the SPRFMO Scientific Committee convened on December 4, 2017 to discuss a revised proposal from the Cook Islands for an exploratory lobster/crab fishery in the Foundation Seamounts. Attending the call were Jim Ianelli as the Chair of the Scientific Committee, Craig Loveridge from the Secretariat, Andrew Jones and Marino Wichman from the Cook Islands, Brian Langseth from the United States, Gang Li from China, Martin Cryer and Shane Geange from New Zealand, and Simon Nicol and Lee Georgeson from Australia. The US and Australia volunteered to be rapporteurs.

Some members initially felt that the revised proposal would still benefit from additional improvement and queried whether SC consideration should be postponed until the next meeting (in 2018). However, after discussion, the group agreed to prepare advice regarding the revised proposal to the best of their ability noting that the timeframes for the upcoming Commission meeting were getting very tight and that drafting an exploratory fishing CMM in time for the Commission meeting was going to be a significant task (for the Cook Islands).

The group agreed that the revised proposal by the Cook Islands was substantially improved in regards to a Data Collection Plan, the other requests specified in the report from SC05, and that intersessional work by the Cook Islands improved the Fisheries Operation Plan. **The group agreed with the proposals' assessment of cumulative impacts, the size of the associated footprint and the expectation that one boat operating with pots over such a large area would have limited impact on the benthos/VMEs.** The proposal also incorporates video monitoring to further assess impacts on the bottom beyond that which is retained by pots. The group acknowledged that limited information exists for the species targeted in the Foundation Seamount and was receptive to a phased approach to exploratory fishing.

The group noted the following:

- That the SPRFMO species profile for *Jasus caveorum* indicates a potential limited range for one of the proposed targeted species, but this was based on limited information. The group agreed that more information would be helpful in the development of an exploratory fishery.
- That the data from previous fishing suggests that catch levels were high, and acknowledge the proposal is based on anticipated catch levels from these past amounts.
- That without further information on catch levels, and corresponding levels of depletion associated with those catches, the choice of a catch limit is subjective, as would be a fishing effort limit.
- The phase 1 design limits fishing to above 600m meaning there is some likelihood that Chaceon red crab may be encountered only rarely.

The group was concerned that the proposed 210 fishing days and 3000 t anticipated catch levels may not be commensurate with the intent of the exploratory fishing CMM to develop fisheries in a gradual and precautionary manner.

Given the requirement that exploratory fishing must follow a scientifically sound precautionary approach, there is a need that the exploratory fishing follow a gradual development. The group agreed to the following recommendation:

The proposal be revised such that the first phase be considered as a pilot study consisting of three 30-day fishing trips (down from 7) distributed over a third of the Seamounts (5-8 out of 20 seamounts). A catch limit may be selected by the Commission (say ranging from 500-1000 t total). However, limiting the initial effort should be sufficiently precautionary and data arising from the pilot study should provide a clearer basis for precautionary catch limits.

Other comments and concerns included:

- Regarding the appendix 13 observer sampling; it was unclear exactly how traps would be selected for sampling. The group recommended that the proposal clarify that the approach would follow a statistically sound sampling approach.
- The group further recommended that the proposal specify that data from the Pilot Study be summarized and presented to the SC at its 2018 meeting to proceed to continue to complete the Phase 1 wide-area survey objectives specified in the proposal. Data from the pilot study as summarized will advise on the need for revisions to catch limits and fine tune data collection and expectations for further research.
- Finally, the group recommended that the proposal specify that the data and a report from Phase 1 would be presented to the SC at its 2019 meeting. This information as noted would be used to inform the design of Phase 2 depletion experiment(s).
- The preliminary nature of the work commitments by partners in the proposal. *The group believed that more definitive commitments were needed and should be explicit.* This issue seems to be minor and is likely implied but would be improved if stated more clearly.

#### ADDITIONAL VIEW PROVIDED BY CHILE

In response to the requested intersessional decision, we would support the proposed SC advice from the subset of the Scientific Committee convened on 4 December 2017. Nevertheless, we would like to ask to include the following views when presenting the advice to the Commission:

- The proposal should consider actions and measures to safeguard the biological processes of lobsters and crabs, including reproductive processes.
- The proposal must contain a spatial sampling design and coverage, in order to collect representative data of the whole area of study.

#### ADDITIONAL VIEW PROVIDED BY NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand also agreed with the proposed SC advice and asked that the following view be included when presenting the advice to the Commission:

- A feature-limit could be considered and would ensure that the overall catch limit cannot be taken from a single seamount. This would avoid unnecessary depletion of a population which could be seamount-specific.