

ABNJ Deep Seas Project Approved

A two-day partners workshop on the ABNJ Deep Seas Project (*Sustainable Fisheries Management and Biodiversity Conservation of Deep-sea Living Marine Resources and Ecosystems in the Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction*) was held on 5–6 June at FAO headquarters in Rome to discuss current status and partner arrangements for the implementation phase of the project. The workshop brought together representatives from regional bodies managing deep-sea fisheries, regional seas programmes, the fishing industry, international NGOs, national fisheries administrations/scientific institutions, civil society and universities as well as representatives of GEF, FAO and UNEP.

The ABNJ Deep Seas Project was endorsed by the GEF CEO in June 2014 and implementation will now begin, starting with setting up the project management team and organizing the inception meeting and first project steering committee.

The main objective of the project is to achieve sustainability in the use of deep-sea living resources and improve biodiversity conservation in the ABNJ through the systematic application of an ecosystem approach for: (i) improving sustainable management practices for deep-sea fisheries, taking into account the impacts on associated ecosystems, (ii) improving the protection of vulnerable marine ecosystems and enhanced conservation and management of components of ecologically and biologically significant areas, and (iii) testing area-based planning and methodologies for deep-sea ecosystems.

Further information on the ABNJ Deep-sea project can be found at the Common Oceans website:

www.commonoceans.org



RFMO Collaboration

FAO frequently collaborates with the deep-sea Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) and has been actively collaborating with them on the development of the ABNJ Deep Seas Project for the last couple years. Each functioning RFMO with a mandate to manage deep-sea fisheries is now a partner in the project after extensive regional discussions. The ABNJ Deep Seas Project will provide a cooperative platform for all deep-sea RFMOs and other interested regional bodies. The project is designed to facilitate sharing of information and experience between regions on topics ranging from innovative stock assessment methodologies to identifying areas likely to contain VMEs to species identification programmes.

The project will also facilitate networks of individuals interested in the deep seas within regions and across regions through the development of a Deep Sea Symposium, institutional partnerships, multi-disciplinary regional discussions and thematic, deep-sea science days.

Further information on FAO activities related to deep-sea fisheries can be found at the FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture deep-sea website:

<http://www.fao.org/fishery/deepsea-highseas/en>

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What's New

Indian Ocean Identification Tools

Deep-sea Cartilaginous Fishes of the Indian Ocean, Vol. 1 – Sharks

<http://www.fao.org/docrep/019/i3477e/i3477e.pdf>

Deep-sea Cartilaginous Fishes of the Indian Ocean, Vol. 2 – Batoids and Chimaeras

<http://www.fao.org/3/a-i3888e.pdf>

Identification Guide to the Deep-sea Cartilaginous Fishes of the Indian Ocean

<http://www.fao.org/3/a-i3486e.pdf>

VME workshop report

Regional Workshop on Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VMEs) in the Indian Ocean

<http://www.fao.org/docrep/018/i3311e/i3311e.pdf>

New Identification Tools for Deep-sea Cartilaginous Fishes of the Indian Ocean

Extract from Volume 1 of the catalogue

Link for online access to the catalogues is found under What's New on the first page.

In the last year FAO has released two species catalogues, comprehensive reviews of the deep-sea cartilaginous fish species of the Indian Ocean, intended to support users when the identification of a species is particularly problematic.

Similar catalogues are planned for other regions, the next being the southeastern Atlantic Ocean.

FAO Names: En – Gulper shark; Fr – Squalé-chagrin commun; Sp – Quelvacho.

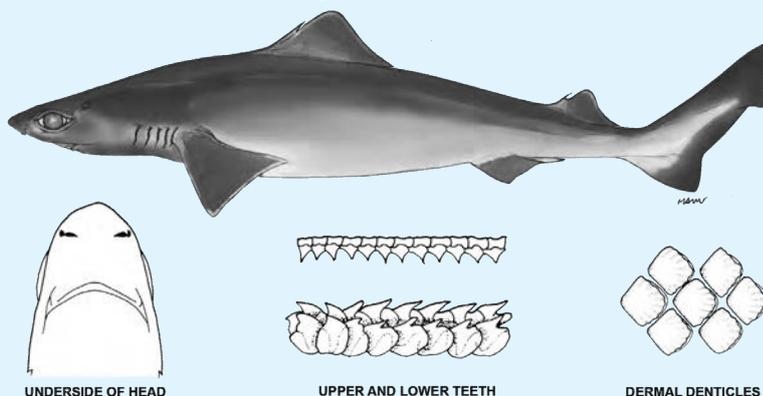
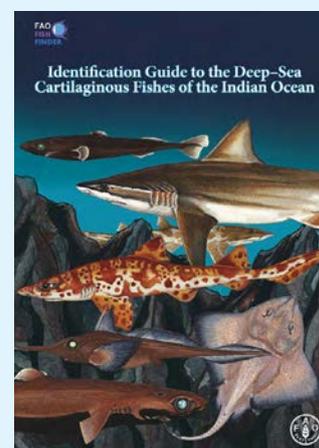


Fig. 88 *Centrophorus granulosus*



Moreover, to support observers, scientists, and crew members working on board of fishing vessels and at landing points in the Indian Ocean, a field identification guide was developed.

The guide includes a selection of species all of which are described, depicted with a colour illustration and photo, and key distinguishing features of similar looking species in the area are highlighted allowing for easy and accurate identification in the field.



In June 2014, a workshop was organized at the Albion Fisheries Research Center in Mauritius with the aim of training scientists from countries bordering the Indian Ocean in the identification of deep-sea cartilaginous fishes and sample processing. The workshop was attended by 19 scientists who were introduced to the anatomical features and taxonomy of the deep-sea sharks occurring in the Indian Ocean and to the methodologies of processing and identifying a selection of specimens caught in the region.



FAO has also started a process that will result in the production of user-friendly identification tools for the two other main groups of deep-sea species impacted by fishing operations: sponges and corals. The high diversity in terms of number of species together with a lack of comprehensive information on their distribution and abundance for several regions make this additional project very challenging.

Finally, FAO is developing a manual that will facilitate the collection of data and information on deep-sea species by observers, scientists and fishers. The manual will include recommendations for the collection of data on species caught in deep-sea fisheries worldwide and will focus on user-friendly guidance on how to gather biological information from a specimen.



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African spotted catshark (*Holohalaelurus punctatus*)

Testing the VME database

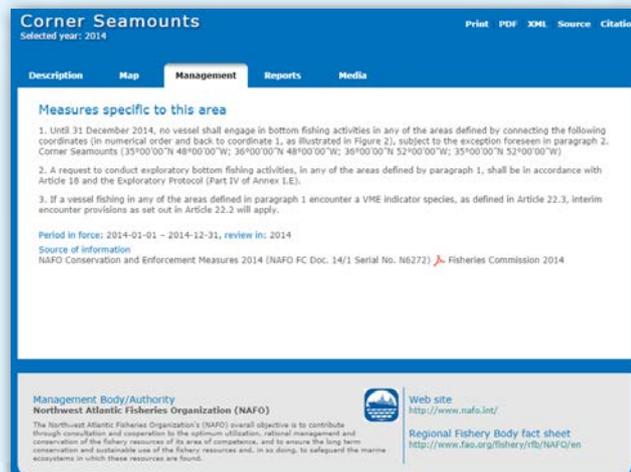
Before the launch of the database, the regional bodies managing the high-seas bottom fisheries in ABNJ are testing a prototype of the VME DataBase. Feedback from the 3-day VME DataBase meeting held at FAO in Rome during May 2014 is being used to provide the finishing touches to the layout and content.

The VME DataBase goes beyond simple mapping. Regional level information is displayed, including bottom fishing footprints and general measures that protect vulnerable marine ecosystems. VME level information is displayed for habitat, biology, impacts, and the specific measures to manage each VME. The database also shows the VME processes in each region, from 2005 to the present day. This information is all displayed in complimentary mapping and factsheets interfaces, with links back to the regional management bodies' original measures and reports documents.



Entry into the VME DataBase is through a main webpage that provides the background to the global VME process and links to relevant international instruments and guidelines, management bodies, a compilation of tools useful in VME identification, etc. The VME DataBase is also engineered for interoperability, and allows for the sharing of spatial and non-spatial data with other information systems. The VME DataBase is due to be released in fall 2014.

FAO, in partnership with the ABNJ Deep Seas project, will explore the potential for including VME research/survey project and Networking/support areas, to provide regional bodies, states, and other users, with further opportunities to present and discuss further information on VMEs.



Screenshots and content only for demonstration purposes

FAO Regional Workshops on VMEs in the SE Atlantic Ocean and North Pacific



Participants of the Swakopmund workshop

In the spring of 2013, the FAO Deep-sea Fisheries (DSF) Programme led a regional workshop in Swakopmund, Namibia, with a focus on vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs) in the southeast Atlantic Ocean.

In March of this year, a similar workshop was held for the North Pacific Ocean, with participants traveling to Tokyo, Japan.

In both workshops, participants discussed the VME concept within the framework of the International Guidelines for the Management of Deep-sea Fisheries in the High Seas, with the aim of raising awareness and building capacity on VMEs and associated management issues in both the southeast Atlantic Ocean and North Pacific Ocean regions. Participants of the workshops included representatives from government departments, research institutes, NGOs, regional organizations and projects, and the FAO organizers.



Participants of the Tokyo workshop

The workshops introduced the global VME database, which is currently under development by FAO, and identified ways in which this database could support the VME process in the southeast Atlantic Ocean and North Pacific Ocean regions. It was recognized that additional work is needed on the VME encounter and exploratory protocols so that new areas are identified and appropriate mitigation measures are applied.

Key outcomes of the workshops were a greater understanding of the players involved in deep-sea conversations and sustainable use, and the networking opportunities that develop from sharing experiences among the players. It is hoped that these conclusions will effectively pave way for a more complete development of the ABNJ DSF Project by bringing together a wide range of partners.

Southeast Atlantic: EAF-Nansen and SEAFO joint survey

The EAF-Nansen project and SEAFO are partnering to conduct a survey in the South East Atlantic Fisheries Organization area in early 2015 using the R/V Dr. Fridtjof Nansen. The survey will contribute to an improved knowledge base on the deep-sea ecosystems of the southeast Atlantic and will support the assessment of deep-sea stocks and vulnerable marine ecosystems. In selected SEAFO fishing areas and closed areas the survey will study fish species targeted by fisheries and seabed fauna that may be vulnerable to impacts from bottom fisheries. Areas to be considered include portions of the Walvis Ridge and selected seamounts in the eastern part of the convention area. The cruise leader will be Dr. Odd Aksel Bergstad of the Institute of Marine Research, Norway.



SEAFO convention area



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