

Blue lines indicate the area meeting the ISRA Criteria; dashed lines indicate the suggested buffer for use in the development of appropriate place-based conservation measures

ICE CREAM SEAMOUNT & PIPE ISRA

New Zealand & Pacific Islands Region

SUMMARY

Ice Cream Seamount & Pipe is located on the southwestern side of Saipan Island in the northwestern Pacific Ocean. This area is situated in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, a self-governing commonwealth in association with the United States of America. This area is composed of a large, submerged coral mound that rises from a bottom at ~20 m to a summit ~6 m below the surface, with coral rocky mounds on a white sandy substrate. Within this area there are: **threatened species** and **undefined aggregations** (Spotted Eagle Ray *Aetobatus ocellatus*).

CRITERIA

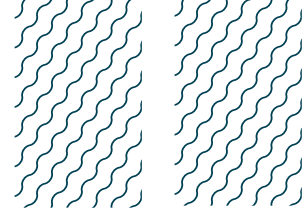
Criterion A - Vulnerability; Sub-criterion C5 - Undefined Aggregations

**NORTHERN
 MARIANA
 ISLANDS**

0-20 metres

0.69 km²





DESCRIPTION OF HABITAT

Ice Cream Seamount & Pipe is located on the southwestern side of Saipan Island in the northwestern Pacific Ocean. This area is situated in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, a self-governing commonwealth in association with the United States of America. Saipan is the largest of the 14 islands of the Northern Mariana Islands. The mean cover of live hard corals is higher on the west coast of Saipan than in other areas around this island (Brainard et al. 2012). This pattern is likely a result of greater habitat availability for reef development and shelter from wave energy on the west coast (Brainard et al. 2012).

This area is composed of a seamount with coral cover that rises from a depth of 15–20 m to a baseball-diamond-sized summit ~5 m below the surface (FishGuyz 2024). This area includes a nearby site (~2 km away) characterised by coral rocky mounds on a white sandy seafloor with a maximum depth of 18–20 m (Let's go Diving 2017). The seawater temperature ranges from 30° C during boreal summer to 27° C during winter (J Wolfe pers. obs. 2013–2024).

This Important Shark and Ray Area is benthopelagic and is delineated from surface waters (0 m) to 20 m based on the bathymetry of the area.

ISRA CRITERIA

CRITERION A – VULNERABILITY

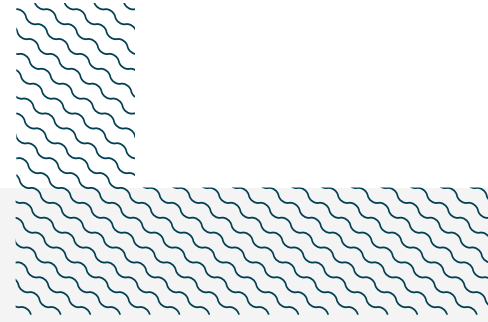
One Qualifying Species considered threatened with extinction according to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species regularly occurs in the area. This is the Endangered Spotted Eagle Ray (Finucci et al. 2023).

SUB-CRITERION C5 – UNDEFINED AGGREGATIONS

Ice Cream Seamount & Pipe is an important area for undefined aggregations of one ray species.

This area is composed of two well-known dive sites for recreational divers on Saipan Island, recognised for the regular and predictable observations of Spotted Eagle Ray aggregations (Let's go Diving 2017; Outlook Travel 2023; FishGuyz 2024; The Marianas 2024). The area was visited year-round (three times per week) by recreational divers between 2013–2024. Spotted Eagle Ray aggregations were observed on almost every visit, especially during winter (December–March) (J Wolfe pers. obs. 2013–2024). Typically, the aggregations range between 2–8 individuals in summer and 8–16 in winter (J Wolfe pers. obs. 2013–2024). The largest aggregations recorded were ~50 individuals (J Wolfe pers. obs. 2024). Divers also note that these 'fevers' are common in winter. The nature and function of these aggregations may be for reproductive purposes. Mating has been observed twice a year every year (J Wolfe pers. obs. 2013–2024). Pregnant female Spotted Eagle Rays have also been observed in the area, determined visually by the presence of extended abdomens (J Wolfe pers. obs. 2024). However, further information is required to determine the nature and function of these aggregations.





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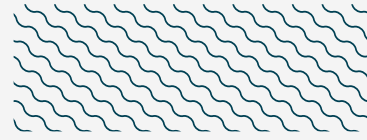
Suggested citation

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QUALIFYING SPECIES

Scientific Name	Common Name	IUCN Red List Category	Global Depth Range (m)	ISRA Criteria/Sub-criteria Met								
				A	B	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	D1	D2
RAYS												
<i>Aetobatus ocellatus</i>	Spotted Eagle Ray	EN	0-40	X						X		

IUCN Red List of Threatened Species Categories are available by searching species names at www.iucnredlist.org Abbreviations refer to: CR, Critically Endangered; EN, Endangered; VU, Vulnerable; NT, Near Threatened; LC, Least Concern; DD, Data Deficient.



REFERENCES

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Finucci B, Rigby CL, Armstrong AO, Rezaie-Atagholipour M. 2024. *Aetobatus ocellatus*. *The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2024*: e.T42566169A124549514.

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