



POSITION

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WWF POSITION:
**21ST SESSION
OF THE
INDIAN OCEAN TUNA COMMISSION (IOTC)**

Yogyakarta, INDONESIA

22 - 27 May 2017

The goals of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) are to ensure the long-term viability of the tuna industry operating throughout the Indian Ocean region and support and promote the development of sustainable tuna fisheries on which this industry depends. We believe that the members of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission can work together with WWF and other partners, NGOs/CSOs and industry stakeholders to achieve these goals while maintaining a healthy ecosystem and safeguarding the rich biodiversity of the region.

At this time, as the Commission continues to evolve toward effective management of their tuna and tuna-like species, WWF wishes to emphasise the following key issues and associated recommendations to the IOTC 21st Session.

Measures to Rebuild the Yellowfin Tuna Stock

Perhaps the greatest ongoing concern for the Commission is the recent change of the status of yellowfin tuna from 'green' to 'red', along with a prediction by the IOTC Scientific Committee of a stock collapse within just a few years if fishing continues at recent high levels.

The IOTC has struggled in the past to respond to issues with some of the other species they manage, and now the focus is on the key stock of yellowfin which makes up a significant and valuable proportion of exports from the region. The Commission must act to ensure the effective implementation of measures to stop the overfishing and start to rebuild the depleted stocks.

The IOTC adopted, in 2016, Resolution 16/01, On an interim plan for rebuilding the Indian Ocean yellowfin tuna stock in the IOTC area of competence, which represents initial steps toward recovery of the yellowfin tuna stock. WWF urge CPC's to fully implement this interim rebuilding plan. Any amendments to this Resolution with respect to the IOTC Scientific Committee's recommendations should only be made on the considered advice of the Scientific Committee.

Importantly, we ask that each member give consideration to what they can do to address the overfishing issue to save the fishery from depletion, and not rely on a few CPCs and/or fishing gears to shoulder the burden of rebuilding the depleted stock.

Recommendation: Follow the recommendations of the IOTC Scientific Committee in order to rebuild yellowfin tuna stocks and implement fully the obligations of IOTC Resolution 16/01

Develop Harvest Strategies (Management Procedures)

WWF accords the development of effective Harvest Strategies (or Management Procedures) and associated Harvest Control Rules for Indian Ocean tuna fisheries the highest priority, and fully supports the IOTC in these efforts, including the facilitation of regional capacity building activities to improve the dialogue among scientists, managers and other stakeholders.

It should be noted by states with fisheries that are considering certification of their fisheries as 'sustainable' with the objective of ensuring market access or improving profitability, that credible third party certification schemes require Harvest Control Rules and appropriate Reference Points to be implemented. It would be expected these states in particular would demonstrate strong support for their own fishing industries by engaging actively in the development of these procedures through support of the IOTC Technical Committee on Management Procedures and other intersessional opportunities to collaborate and cooperate on these issues.

Recommendation: Continue intersessional work towards harvest strategies (or management procedures) with the objective of formally adopting and implementing management procedures for each of the key tuna species

Monitoring, Control and Surveillance

Monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) system is the executive arm for well-managed fisheries. Indian Ocean coastal States face many challenges in implementing a sound system. Strengthened MCS capability is key to combating illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing which occurs on a large scale in the region threatening and undermining social and economic benefits of healthy tuna stocks in Indian Ocean waters. WWF endorses the following actions in support of MCS:

1. Strengthen the reporting and reliability of scientific data

For many IOTC stocks the IOTC Secretariat is required to estimate the level of catches, which increases the uncertainty of the stock assessment results. Hence it is crucial to improve data gathering for all species caught in IOTC fisheries, notably through the implementation of the IOTC Regional Observer Scheme.

The effective management of IOTC's valuable stocks relies on the accurate monitoring and timely reporting of Catch Statistics to feed into stock assessments and the development of effective management options by the IOTC Scientific Committee. Of significant concern, is the quality of data collection and levels of reporting with regard to Coastal and/or Artisanal Tuna Fisheries, which is generally low throughout the region.

WWF encourages all relevant CPCs to commit to full compliance with IOTC resolutions relating to data collection and reporting of catch related information. Acknowledging the complexity and difficulty of many of the requirements, WWF is pleased to work closely with any Indian Ocean coastal state wishing to improve these aspects of their fisheries and welcome contact from these states to discuss possible options for improvement.

2. Improve the Regional Observer Scheme

Levels of observer coverage within the IOTC are currently very low relative to levels achieved in other tuna RFMOs. Appropriate observer coverage is essential in ensuring that IOTC management arrangements in place to safeguard the tuna resources of all CPCs are implemented. WWF strongly recommends development and adoption of plans to increase observer coverage to at least the minimum levels required by IOTC resolution.

3. Compliance with Conservation and Management Measures

IOTC members have adopted many highly desirable and necessary Conservation Management Measures. Unfortunately, compliance with a large proportion of these has been low.

WWF encourages all CPCs to recognise the importance of these measures in ensuring the future of their fisheries and the health of the ecosystems, from which they gain tremendous economic wealth, and urge them to work toward strengthening national and regional compliance with the adopted IOTC Conservation and Management Measures.

One of the key priorities for the Commission in this and in future years is to ensure that CPCs are taking all necessary steps to implement the provisions under Resolution 16/01 on an interim plan for rebuilding the Indian Ocean yellowfin tuna. WWF urges those CPCs who still have to put in place the required arrangements to take urgent action to deliver on their contribution to the required reductions in yellowfin catches necessary to allow the rebuilding of this important stock.

Compliance is also key in ensuring effective monitoring, control and surveillance that are essential to well-managed fisheries. This is not to underestimate the challenges that implementation of the related measures presents for IOTC coastal states. Yet the sustainability of the fish stocks which contribute to their fishing activities and livelihoods depends on it.

Establish Effective Management of FADs

The region lacks effective management of FADs in terms of effort and verification. It is critical to agree, at the IOTC level, precautionary limits for the numbers of deployed FADs per vessel. The reduction in the number of FADs to levels of at least half of current permissible active buoys is encouraged and the relevant clauses in the proposal submitted by Mauritius (IOTC-2017-S21-PropD) is a step toward this important goal.

WWF also urges the consideration of limiting overall effort which the simple limitation of FAD numbers does not address. The use of so-called supply vessels which greatly increase the efficiency of purse-seine fleets poses a risk to the recovery and future sustainability of the tuna industry. WWF therefore fully supports the reduction in the number of supply vessels to zero as outlined in the proposal by South Africa and the Maldives (IOTC-2017-S21-PropI) and, in principle, the phased reduction as a first step proposed by Mauritius (IOTC-2017-S21-PropD).

In recent years the market has begun to react to the increasingly negative perceptions of FAD-based fishing. Any parties which have an interest in competing in these markets, particularly the EU market, should strongly consider supporting these and any other measures which represent first steps in the critical rehabilitation of the image currently afflicting this sector of the industry.

Recommendation: Adopt proposals limiting active FAD numbers and reducing the number of supply vessels.

Conservation of Vulnerable Non-Tuna Species

WWF is committed to stronger conservation measures for sharks, rays, sea turtles, seabirds and cetaceans and will support proposals improving the protection for these key ecosystem species.

Many shark and ray species in the Indian Ocean remain subject to unsustainable levels of fishing mortality coupled with significant data gaps in catch and biological data. WWF and TRAFFIC have grave concerns with the lack of management

of sharks and rays within the IOTC region as a whole. The Secretariat should recognise the needs of coastal States in the IOTC region to manage their shark populations, and provide assistance for doing so.

WWF supports the Mobula and Manta proposal produced by the Maldives and Seychelles (IOTC-2017-S21-PropC), but would like to remind those members that are Parties to the Convention of Migratory Species (CMS) that they are required to totally protect Mobula and Manta species, as they are included on Appendix I and II of CMS and Annex I of the CMS MOU on the conservation of migratory sharks. Therefore, these members should not agree to the adoption of the proposed Resolution unless the text in paragraph one of the proposed Resolution which exempts artisanal fishers is removed.

WWF also supports the EU proposal (IOTC-2017-S21-PropM) requiring shark fins to be landed naturally attached to the body of shark species permitted to be retained by IOTC.

Finally, the EU (IOTC-2017-S21-PropK) and French (IOTC-2017-S21-PropP) proposals for the banning of driftnets within the EEZs of members from 2019 are supported by WWF.

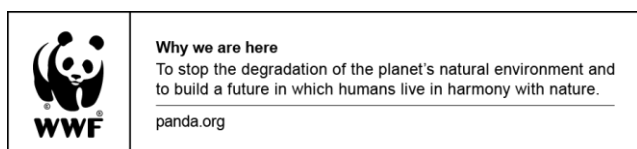
WWF and TRAFFIC support the measures currently adopted by IOTC for sharks and those proposed above. However, there are further actions which need to be addressed by the IOTC at its 2017 round of meetings and into the future:

1. Implement the recommendations for bycatch that were endorsed at Kobe III and adopt an annually updated report card system against implementation of these recommendations for all of the IOTC;
2. Acquire, through data collected from observer programs and other means, estimates of the number of captures and releases of all sharks and rays, including the status upon release (dead or alive), and reporting of this information to the IOTC;
3. Introduce a scheme to document the capture and trade of sharks whereby it allows for traceability through to the final market state;
4. Ensure the implementation requirements for CITES listed sharks are undertaken by CITES Parties and Non-Parties trading with CITES Parties where they are required to make non-detriment and legal findings in order to issue export permits for trade in these species. Where IOTC members make non-detriment findings for shark species they should make these publicly available;
5. Encourage the development of reference points and management for non-target species of all shark and ray species;
6. Ensure the adopted CMMs for sharks and rays are complied with by all IOTC members.

Recommendation: Support the adoption of scientifically-validated measures that improve the conservation and management of vulnerable species; specifically, adopt proposals to protect mobula and manta species and that require shark fins to remain naturally attached until the first point of landing.

Concluding Comment

WWF certainly understands the members of the IOTC are diverse in culture, language and interests in the tuna industry. However, our main ask is that they look beyond these differences toward ensuring that the one thing they all have in common, a dependence on a shared tuna resource for the livelihoods of their communities and industries, is not threatened through a continued lack of effective fisheries management.



For more information

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