



# International Game Fish Association

## Fishing Hall of Fame & Museum

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The International Game Fish Association (IGFA) is a non-profit organization that represents recreational anglers throughout the world. IGFA was established in 1939, has active members in 173 countries, is the governing body for international recreational fishing, and provides rules for ethical angling practices. Many of IGFA's members target the highly migratory species managed by IOTC, especially marlin, sailfish and spearfish (i.e. billfish) which are primarily caught and released.

IGFA has great concern about how highly migratory species are being managed on a global level for recreational anglers. The lack of data and accurate reporting on billfish catch is of particular concern. As an organization that is committed to the conservation of game fishes, IGFA has deployed 314 pop-up satellite archival tags in marlin around the world in the last five years, many of which have been in waters under this organization's purview. The information gained from this exercise is available to your scientific committee.

The following are IGFA's recommendations for the 21<sup>st</sup> Session of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission.

### **Billfish**

- Although primarily a commercial bycatch species, billfish are highly sought after recreational species that are primarily caught and released. IGFA urges the IOTC to manage all billfish at higher abundance levels than  $B_{MSY}$  for recreational anglers. We also urge the IOTC to adopt mandatory release of any billfish that is landed alive.
- The 2015 striped marlin stock assessment confirmed previous assessments that biomass is well below the level which would produce MSY (5,220 t) and the stock is currently overfished and subject to overfishing. In 2016, reported catches increased to 4,410 t and there is a very high risk of exceeding MSY reference levels by 2017 if catches increase further or are maintained at current levels. IGFA recommends further decrease in longline catch and effort, reducing catch to no more than 2,949 t.
- Current catch (2013-2015) of black marlin are significantly higher than the level that would produce MSY, with the 2015 catch nearly double that which would achieve MSY. As such, and the stock is considered overfished and subject to overfishing. The prognosis for this stock is grim and a 40% reduction of current catch levels is expected to give the stock roughly a 5% chance of being rebuilt. In order to begin rebuilding the stock, IGFA recommends a decrease in total catch to no more than 4,000 t.
- Current harvest (2011-2015) of blue marlin is higher than MSY (11,925 t) and the stock is currently subject to overfishing, and there is high probability (70-80%) to exceed MSY if high levels of catch continue. IGFA recommends reducing catch to no more than 11,704 t so the risk of exceeding MSY will be reduced to close to or less than 50%.
- In 2015, data poor stock assessment methods determined that Indo-Pacific sailfish stock is not yet overfished, but is subject to overfishing. Given the increase in coastal gillnet catch and effort in recent years and insufficiency data to evaluate the effect this will have on the resource, IGFA recommends taking a precautionary approach where catches are limited to no more than 20,000 t.
- IGFA further recommends implementing a prohibition on billfish entering into international trade. Similar legislation has recently been passed, at the request of IGFA, in the United States that now bans importation of marlin, sailfish and spearfish into the continental United States.
- IGFA recommends all countries be required to report dead discards and use circle hooks in their longline fisheries.

## Tuna

- Based on the 2015 assessment of Yellowfin tuna, stock biomass is below the level that will support the MSY and that fishing mortality is above the level that will produce MSY. Therefore, stock is determined to be overfished and subject to overfishing. IGFA recommends catches reduced in Indian Ocean to at or below MSY I (422,000 t) and improvement in data collection and reporting.

## Sharks

- IGFA recommends that IOTC prohibit the removal of shark fins at sea to improve the enforcement of the shark finning ban.
- IGFA recommends banning wire traces on all longlines.

## FADs

- IGFA support the development of an IOTC working group for FADs. We have great concern about the growing use of FADs and how it can lead to high levels of bycatch of unintended and/or undersized species. We urge the working group to better evaluate the impact of FADs and to also better quantify the number of FADs that can be sustainably deployed. IGFA supports specific measures to:
  - Reduce the overall number of FADs deployed
  - Continue to prohibit the use of lights on drift FADs
  - Employ individual reference numbers and GPS communication for each individual FAD
  - Have vessels report to their flag nation the number of FADs they are fishing
  - Have annual reporting and electronic monitoring of deployed FADs
  - Have management plans that specifically address how to reduce the unintended and/or undersized species bycatch associated with FADs

## Data Collection

- IGFA recommends enhanced data reporting regarding catch and effort, separated by numbers in live weight of retained species and numbers/live weight of both live and dead discards for all species under the IOTC mandate as well as the most commonly caught elasmobranch species, marine turtles and seabirds according to records of catches and incidents as established in Resolution 13/03.

## IUU

- IGFA recommends that IOTC strengthen the controls against illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

## General

- Recreational angling is an established and important economic entity in developed countries and a growing one in many developing nations. As such, IGFA wishes that IOTC recognize both its relevance and that it may necessitate alternate management objectives than those used in commercial fisheries. As it is the world's peak body regarding recreational fisheries, IGFA kindly offers its consultation to IOTC on recreational fisheries issues.
- Managing fisheries on the basis of MSY is an excessively risk-prone approach. As such, IGFA suggests that IOTC adopt a target above  $B_{MSY}$  to compensate for biological, environmental and data uncertainties. Many recreational fisheries are catch and release in nature, where anglers prefer to catch more and bigger fish than to necessarily harvest fish. Managing stocks on the level of MSY not only reduces the abundance of fish but also their average size. Maintaining stocks at higher abundances (i.e., optimum yield) also benefits recreational anglers that release their fish and also contributes to the substantial economic value of these fisheries. IGFA feels this is especially true with bycatch species such as marlin and sailfish that have little commercial value but great economic value to recreational anglers.
- IGFA supports measures to stabilize the level of fishing capacity active on the stocks of high commercial value under the IOTC responsibility.