

Position Statement of FPAOI for the 21st Annual Session of The Indian Ocean Tuna Commission

Who is FPAOI?

The Federation of Artisanal Fishermen of the Indian Ocean (FPAOI) was created in 2015, with the aim of representing and defending the interests of artisanal fishermen in the countries of the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC). FPAOI currently groups together 18 professional organisations and associations representing artisanal fishermen in the Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, La Réunion (France) and the Seychelles. Through the FPAOI, artisanal fishermen in the Indian Ocean work for the recognition of their rights, the importance of their sector in the economies of the region, their contribution to food security and their role in the management of the resources on which they depend.

The FPAOI was established on the basis that artisanal fishers are currently unable to participate fully in decisions making relating to the management and exploitation of the common resources on which they depend, in particular tuna. To remedy this situation, FPAOI wishes to promote the participation of its members in decision-making processes at the national and regional levels. FPAOI is therefore grateful for this opportunity to attend the IOTC plenary session as an observer for the first time.

The importance of artisanal fisheries in the IOC region

The fisheries sector is a pillar of our island economies. A recent report by the Indian Ocean Commission¹ emphasised that the value chain of the fisheries and aquaculture in our countries represent an annual turnover of 1.7 billion Euros, and creating (Direct added value) of 901.7 million Euros. This is equivalent to an annual contribution to the cumulative GDP of IOC countries of around 2.9%.

Artisanal fisheries contribute significantly to this creation of wealth, accounting for about 45% of landings from sea fishing (in terms of volume and value). Almost all of the jobs generated by the fisheries sector in IOC countries - about 130,000 direct and indirect jobs - are attributable to artisanal fisheries. This gives us an idea of the level of fishing dependency of our coastal communities and the importance of this sector to the livelihood and food security of our people.

In the IOTC area, 50% of tuna catches are landed by small-scale fisheries. At the level of the South West Indian Ocean basin and in the IOC area in particular, tuna is a key resource for inshore fishing. In view of the modernization of our small-scale fishing fleets, the proportional importance of tuna in the landings of small-scale fishing in our countries is bound to increase, given the willingness of our countries to limit the fishing effort of demersal resources, and development aspirations of our domestic fishery industries. It is therefore up to our countries, coastal Member States of the IOTC, to manage this shared resource to guarantee the future of our sector.

On the occasion of the 21st session of the IOTC, the FPAOI wishes to emphasize 3 points, which it considers important for the management of this resource and to enable the development aspirations of our domestic fishery industries to materialize.

¹ <http://commissionoceanindien.org/fileadmin/projets/smartfish/Rapport/Rapport-COIsocio-eco4.pdf>

1. Management of fishing capacity

The FPAOI noted the concerns about the status of the yellow fin tuna stock in the Indian Ocean, as raised by the IOTC Scientific Committee. Given the importance of tuna to our artisanal fisheries and the food security of the peoples of the South-West Indian Ocean, precautionary measures are needed to reduce fishing effort and ensure the long term sustainability of the stock.

In order to secure the sustainability of stocks, in particular yellow fin tuna and big eye tuna, FPAOI supports the proposals made by IOTC Member States to reduce the number of drifting FADs and including the gradual reduction of the number of supply vessels. FPAOI stresses, however, that the reduction in fishing capacity will also have to include a ceiling on the number and capacity of purse fishing vessels, and also in particular industrial long liners, in order to manage the current fishing efforts and avoid a transfer of fishing capacity, from one type of fishery to another, which would inevitably lead to excessive fishing capacity and thus a decline in the stock, with an unfavourable impact on the islands of the South West Indian Ocean.

2. Allocation of fishing opportunities

FPAOI has carefully monitored the discussions on the limitation of harvests and on the possible distribution of a TAC among IOTC Member States. In this regard, FPAOI took note of the Maldives proposal for the establishment of a system for allocating fishing opportunities.

Although FPAOI supports the principle of allocating fishing opportunities by state to allow for consistent management, it is concerned about the principles and criteria that could govern the TAC distribution system. In particular, FPAOI wishes to highlight the potential deviations of an allocation system that would establish a prevalence of historical catches (allocated to states independently of the flag) contrary to the interests and aspirations of coastal states.

Moreover, FPAOI wishes to emphasize the risk of eviction of artisanal fisheries which such a system could exacerbate if its socio-economic importance is not well documented and considered in the allocation of fishing opportunities.

3. Consideration of socio-economic aspects

Given the difficulties that our states face in highlighting the socio-economic importance of artisanal fisheries, FPAOI supports all initiatives that can provide insight into this issue. In particular, FPAOI encourages the States of the region to establish mechanisms to monitor the main socio-economic indicators so that the importance of our profession is recognized and that our sector as a whole is better taken into account in the decision making processes.

As such, FPAOI strongly supports the Seychelles proposal to set up a Permanent Working Group within the IOTC to ensure that socio-economic aspects are taken into account in the definition and implementation of management measures. If the creation of such a Working Group were to materialise, FPAOI wishes to be part of the group to make its contribution.