
ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AN INTERIM HARVEST CONTROL RULE FOR SKIPJACK TUNA

SUBMITTED BY: MALDIVES, 06 APRIL 2013

Explanatory Memorandum

This proposal is a direct result of the adoption of the Precautionary Approach (Resolution 12/01) followed by Recommendation 12/14 on interim limit and target reference points. Without harvest control measures in place, Resolution 12/01 would be meaningless.

It is understood that harvest controls rules should start with defining management objectives and with agreed management reference points of the stock. Essentially harvest controls rules (HCRs) are a pre-agreed course of management action(s) to bring about desired change in stock in relation to the agreed reference points (trigger, target and limit reference points). In this regard HCRs formulate a procedure for making harvest policy decisions, such as converting outcomes from a stock assessment into management actions (i.e. increasing, maintaining, or decreasing fishing levels) to achieve the desired state.

Pre-agreed harvest control rules allow managers to act immediately when the state of the fishery degrades beyond acceptable limits (e.g. the limit reference point), which can otherwise be a time-consuming process for fisheries spanning multiple jurisdictions. Without explicit rules to govern harvest levels, there is a tendency for exploitation rates to move towards levels that maximize short-term gains rather than levels that achieve long-term objectives (e.g. stable yields, maximizing catch rates, maintaining sufficient reproductive capacity, or preventing overfishing). Key features of HCR are:

- provide a format to operationalize management objectives
- integrate management parameters (e.g. target and limit reference points)
- specify pre-agreed responses to changes in the status of the stock
- increase transparency in how harvest management decisions are made
- and provide a means for the development of rational fisheries management plans through science-based decision making.

A preferred approach to formally derive HCRs is through management strategy evaluations (MSE) with involvement of the stakeholders. MSE provides formal and objective structure to test the various management interventions and evaluate risk levels of breaching the targets and limits and eventually coming up with agreed HCRs.

The Scientific Committee has endorsed a work programme for MSE through the Working Party on Methods. The WPM is having a series of inter-sessional meetings engaging national scientists and consultants to undertake this work. Developing an MSE framework is highly technical and a time consuming exercise.

The interim harvest control rules presented here are simple time area interventions that attempt to control the fishing effort should the references points are breached. These interim harvest control rules will be revised and/or replaced when MSE work is complete.

RESOLUTION 13/XX

ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AN INTERIM HARVEST CONTROL RULE FOR SKIPJACK TUNA

The Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC),

RECALLING that Article 5, paragraph c, of the Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea of December 1982 relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks (UNFSA), establishes the application of the precautionary approach as a general principle for sound fisheries management;

FURTHER RECALLING that Article 6, and Annex II, of UNFSA provide guidelines for the implementation of the precautionary approach, including the adoption of provisional reference points when information for establishing reference points is absent or poor;

NOTING that Article 7.5 of the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries also recommends the implementation of the precautionary approach, inter alia, on the basis of stock-based target and limit reference points;

NOTING that recommendations 37 and 38 of the Performance Review Panel, adopted by the Commission as Resolution 09/01, indicate that pending the amendment or replacement of the IOTC Agreement to incorporate modern fisheries management principles, the Commission should implement the precautionary approach as set forth in the UNFSA;

MINDFUL that Paragraph 29.6 of the FAO Guidelines for the Eco-labelling of Fish and Fishery Products from Marine Capture Fisheries, revision 1, 2009, and other eco-certification initiatives requires the implementation of the precautionary approach as an important criterion to assess the sustainability of a fishery;

RECALLING the time–area closure adopted by the Commission towards the conservation of tropical tuna stocks, described in Resolution 12/13 *for the conservation and management of tropical tunas stocks in the IOTC area of competence*;

MINDFUL of the advice of the Scientific Committee on the situation of skipjack tuna;

RECALLING Resolution 12/01 on the implementation of the Precautionary Approach and Recommendation 12/14 on interim reference points;

RECALLING that the IOTC Scientific Committee has initiated a process leading to a management strategy evaluation to improve upon the provision of scientific advice;

ADOPTS in accordance with paragraph 1 of Article IX of the IOTC Agreement, that:

1. On a provisional basis and until the Management Strategy Evaluation for skipjack tuna is completed; and on the basis of the best available evidence supplied by the Scientific Committee; the following interim harvest control rule is implemented for skipjack tuna;
 - a) If the most recent biomass of skipjack tuna is estimated to be above B_{MSY} and the most recent fishing mortality is estimated to be below F_{MSY} , no action will be taken;
 - b) If the biomass of skipjack tuna is estimated to be below the level that produces MSY (i.e. lower than the interim target reference point B_{MSY}); or the fishing mortality is estimated to be above the level that produces MSY (above interim target reference point F_{MSY}); then the area defined by the following coordinates will be closed for purse-seine vessels from 0000 hours on 1 October to 2400 hours on 1 December of the year following the determination of the status of the stock (Annex I):

0° – 10° North
40° and 70° East

- c) If the biomass of skipjack tuna is estimated to be below the interim limit reference point (B_{Lim}); or the fishing mortality is estimated to be above the limit reference point (F_{Lim}); then the above area will be closed for purse-seine vessels from 0000 hours on 1 August to 2400 hours on 1 December of the year following the determination of the status of the stock.
2. All vessels fishing within the IOTC area of competence in the year of implementation, regardless of the flag under which they operate or whether they change flag during the year, shall observe the area and period closure.
 3. CPC flag states shall monitor the compliance of their vessels with this Resolution, notably through VMS, and will provide a summary of VMS records related to their fleet operation in the previous year for the consideration of the Compliance Committee.
 4. Fishing vessels that do not comply with IOTC Resolution 06/03 *on establishing a vessel monitoring system programme* shall not be permitted to be active in the IOTC area of competence.

Annex I

