



POSITION

MAY

2013



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Smart Fishing Initiative

17TH SESSION OF THE INDIAN OCEAN TUNA COMMISSION (IOTC): WWF POSITION

Grand Baie, Mauritius

6 – 10 May 2013

Advances in fisheries science over many decades have provided scientists and managers with an unprecedented ability to monitor and safeguard fish stocks. Now, in the 21st century, adaptive and progressive fishery managers worldwide are applying proven tools and methods to effectively manage their fisheries and ensure stocks are maintained at levels guaranteeing optimal economic benefits for their respective nations.

However, the potentially irreversible consequences of continued inaction by other nations increase each additional year that vulnerable fish stocks are exposed to redundant or ineffectual fishing and management practices. As fleet capacity and efficiencies increase, the threat to fish stocks and the livelihoods of fishers have never been higher. Communities who rely on fish as significant and traditional sources of nutrition look to their governments to act responsibly in order to ensure their continued food security. This goal cannot be achieved by maintaining the status quo.

The goals of the WWF are to ensure the long-term viability of tuna stocks throughout the Indian Ocean region and support and promote the development of sustainable fisheries on these stocks.

At this time WWF wish to emphasise the following key issues and associated recommendations to the IOTC 17th Session.

Develop Harvest Control Rules using appropriate Reference Points

No fishery of any significant scale can claim to be effectively managed in the absence of pre-agreed mandatory actions to be taken in response to changes in indicators of stock status. These changes in stock status can be measured against defined Reference Points. The actions to be taken by fisheries management bodies in relation to fluctuations by stocks are defined by Harvest Control Rules (HCR) which incorporate the Reference Points as triggers for these actions. HCRs are a fundamental fisheries management tool.

The IOTC has been provided with interim (non-binding) reference points in Recommendation 12/14 and WWF strongly recommend that the IOTC move to adopt these reference points in a binding Resolution and proceed to evaluate their use and incorporation in Harvest Control Rules.

WWF accord the development of effective Harvest Control Rules for Indian Ocean tuna fisheries the highest priority, and would fully support the IOTC in these efforts.

WWF supports the SC recommendation *“that the Commission consider the adoption of the interim target and limit reference points as a Resolution. Furthermore, interim harvest controls rules should be considered by the Commission for adoption in the Resolution.”*

Catch Documentation Scheme (CDS)

Fishery managers gain confidence in using Harvest Control Rules when uncertainty about the status of tuna stocks relative to the Reference Points can be minimised. The key to reducing uncertainty is to improve the collection of fisheries data.

Significant improvements in obtaining estimates of fishing mortality can only be achieved through the use of monitoring schemes that are applied at the point of harvest such as a Catch Documentation Scheme (CDS). The timely recording and reporting of catches, discards and other incidental mortality from commercial operations is noticeably lacking in the Indian Ocean context for most tuna fisheries.

WWF strongly supports the implementation of adequate CDS for the IOTC as a high priority. WWF would support initiatives designed to improve catch documentation for Indian Ocean tuna fisheries, with particular emphasis on artisanal and other, non-industrial, tuna fisheries.

Catch Limits

Bigeye, Yellowfin and Skipjack Tuna

WWF urges the Commission to constrain catches within the IOTC Scientific Committees (SC) recommended MSY levels. This means not exceeding 102,900 tonnes for bigeye, 300,000 tonnes for yellowfin and 512,000 tonnes for skipjack.

Albacore

WWF is greatly concerned about the potential state of the albacore stock for which overfishing is occurring. The IOTC SC clearly highlighted the considerable risk to the stock status at current effort levels. The SC has

also advised the Commission that Maintaining or increasing effort in the core albacore fishing grounds is likely to result in further declines in albacore biomass, productivity and CPUE. The impacts of piracy in the western Indian Ocean has resulted in the displacement of a substantial portion of longline fishing effort into the traditional albacore fishing areas in the southern and eastern Indian Ocean.

WWF strongly urges the provision of complete and accurate data to the IOTC Secretariat, as is already required of CPCs; and adoption of appropriate conservation and management measures to ensure fishing effort is reduced where applicable to facilitate the recovery of the albacore stock to a sustainable level.

Mitigation of Bycatch Impacts

WWF requests that IOTC members, participating territories and cooperating non-members remain mindful of their responsibility to address the bycatch of species and take immediate and appropriate action. A number of environmental NGOs (including WWF and TRAFFIC) have developed a Compendium (2011)² of best practice Conservation and Management Measures (CMMs) to address the bycatch of four taxonomic groups.

WWF is concerned about the potential impact of purse seine fishing on populations of cetaceans and supports measures to reduce this impact.

WWF also notes, with significant concern, the extremely limited data on sharks in the Indian Ocean and strongly urges the adoption of improved reporting and conservation measures to redress this deficiency. WWF encourage the prohibition on purse seine setting around whale sharks and the implementation of actions to require the release, minimising harm where practicable, of all hammerhead, oceanic whitetip and silky sharks.

Rights Based Management

WWF note the recent efforts by IOTC toward controlling capacity and realising the maximum economic benefits of sustainable tuna stocks through ongoing work on a comprehensive rights-based management (RBM) system for IOTC tuna fisheries.

WWF recommends that any RBM program consider the equitable allocation of fishing rights in the first instance, taking into additional consideration the ecological, economic, and social characteristics of regional fisheries. In the Indian Ocean context, WWF recognise that special attention must be given to the needs of small-scale fisheries and fishing dependent communities.

The sense of 'ownership' of a fishery can provide compelling incentive for efforts to reverse fisheries decline. WWF therefore encourages the IOTC to continue efforts into establishing a quota allocation system and complementary management strategies for tuna and tuna-like species in the Indian Ocean.

Our Smart Fishing Vision and Goals:

Vision: The world's oceans are healthy, well-managed and full of life, providing valuable resources for the welfare of humanity.

2020 Goals: The responsible management and trade of four key fishery populations results in recovering and resilient marine eco-systems, improved livelihoods for coastal communities and strengthened food security for the Planet.



Why we are here

To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

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