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Smart Fishing Initiative

WWF POSITION: 20TH SESSION OF THE INDIAN OCEAN TUNA COMMISSION (IOTC)

La Reunion, FRANCE

23 - 27 May 2016

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 20th Session.

Measures to Rebuild the Yellowfin Tuna Stock

Perhaps the greatest concern facing the delegates to the 20th Session of 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 latest Scientific Committee advice recommends a reduction of catches by at least 20% of current levels (2014), to reach the interim target reference points with 50% probability by 2024.

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 implement immediate measures to stop the overfishing and start to rebuild the depleted stocks.

A number of CPCs are proposing measures this year which begin to address the overfishing crisis threatening the future of the yellowfin stock (IOTC-2016-S20-PropG; IOTC-2016-S20-PropF). WWF asks that coastal states who have not prepared their own proposals give support to those that have, in order to achieve the much needed consensus required for the adoption of proposed conservation measures.

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: Adopt measures that reduce yellowfin fishing catches by at least 20% of current (2014) levels

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 Maldives, Kenya, Mauritius, Tanzania, and Mozambique have proposed a harvest control rule for the skipjack stock (IOTC-2016-S20-PropB), which aims "to maintain the skipjack tuna stock at, or above, the target reference point and well above the limit reference point". The actions associated with the HCR are proposed catch limits calculated based on a numbers of control parameters.

WWF accords the development of effective 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.

An absence of effective harvest control rules has contributed to the current 'red' status of Indian Ocean yellowfin tuna. If HCRs had been in place, there would have been a requirement to respond appropriately to annual catch recommendations by the IOTC Scientific Committee. Moderate changes in fishing effort would have maintained the stock in the 'green' or 'safe' range and avoided the current situation which will require long-lasting and difficult measures to rebuild the yellowfin fishery,

Similar undesirable outcomes may be avoided by the adoption of harvest control rules for other IOTC species, such as bigeye tuna and skipjack tuna, in addition to all other stocks managed by the Commission.

Finally, it should be noted by states with fisheries that are considering certification of their fisheries as sustainable in order to ensure market access or improve profitability, that credible third party certification schemes require Harvest Control Rules and appropriate Reference Points to be implemented. It would be expected these states would give strong consideration to supporting their own fishing industries by actively supporting proposals contributing to achieving these outcomes.

Recommendation: Adopt a robust harvest control rule for the skipjack stock

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.

WWF supports the proposal to enhance the implementation of the Resolution 11/04 on a Regional Observer Scheme (IOTC-2016-S20-PropH). This measure aims to improve the collection of verified catch data and other scientific data related to the fisheries for tuna and tuna-like species in the IOTC area of competence and therefore contribute to the scientific assessment of IOTC stocks.

3. Port State Measures Agreement

The EU's proposal (IOTC-2016-S20-PropP) amends Resolution 10/11 (On Port State Measures To Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing) to ensure the gradual uptake leading to full utilization of the e-Port State Measures (PSM) application by all CPCs. WWF congratulates the IOTC Secretariat and partners for developing the developing an online communication system, which is designed to facilitate CPCs compliance with Resolution 10/11 obligations whilst also assisting MCS activities, strengthening the fight against IUU and therefore improving the overall management and conservation of IOTC fisheries.

There is a need to build knowledge and technical capacity within government departments and relevant sectors (including industry) on the impacts of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. It is imperative to address unreported fishing by estimating the extent of unreported catches in the Indian Ocean, increasing engagement with states with low catch reporting and addressing the issue of dual-registry of vessels and flag hopping. It is thus a key concern to promote the ratification of Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA) across the Indian Ocean using existing frameworks and assess nation's' capacity to implement the agreement.

WWF welcomes any involvement, commitment or action to be taken forward by coastal states on ratification of the PSMA.

Recommendation: adopt amendments to Resolution 10/11, to ensure uptake of the new e-Port State Measures system (IOTC-2016-S20-PropP)

4. 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.

The work of the IOTC Secretariat in conducting many Compliance Support Missions throughout the region has resulted in notable and in some cases remarkable improvement in compliance with a number of measures. WWF urges all states which have benefited from this program to maintain or improve these levels of compliance and to work further on improving the quality of the information returned to the Secretariat in order to facilitate effective monitoring and assessment of the tuna stocks.

WWF supports the Seychelles proposal for a Working Party on the Implementation of Conservation and Management Measures (WPICMM) (IOTC-2016-S20-PropV), which seeks to:

- a) Alleviate the technical discussions, workload and time pressures on the Compliance Committee, and permit it to focus on higher level compliance implementation strategies in its work for the Commission;
- b) Enhance the technical capacity of CPCs to understand and implement IOTC Conservation and Management Measures; and
- c) Prioritise implementation issues and develop operational standards for use by CPCs.

The groups' mandate will include reviewing existing measures, recommending actions to improve compliance, and sanctions for non-compliance.

Recommendation: Agree to the formation of the "Working Party on the Implementation of Conservation and Management Measures"

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. WWF support the use of limited numbers of instrumented FADs by purse seine fleets operating in the Indian Ocean. WWF supports a cut in the numbers of active FADs to half of the current limit and urge the Commission to support proposals relating to this measure (IOTC-2016-S20-PropL; IOTC-2016-S20-PropM)

Recommendation: Adopt proposals limiting active FAD numbers to a maximum of half the current limit.

Conservation of Vulnerable Non-Tuna Species

WWF and TRAFFIC¹ are 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. Therefore, the Secretariat must recognise the needs of coastal States in the IOTC region to manage their shark populations, and provide assistance for doing so.

IOTC has previously recognised that CITES listed shark and ray species are caught in the Indian Ocean. IOTC members who are CITES Parties are obligated to implement the listings through conducting Non Detriment Findings (NDFs) issuing relevant permits and certificates (IOTC-2014-WPEB10-12). The IOTC committees and commission must assist CPCs by providing adequate information so that its members can adequately conduct NDFs. This is of particular importance given that catches may come from shared stocks. As with CITES listed species, sharks and rays listed within

¹ TRAFFIC is a strategic alliance of WWF and IUCN. It is the leading non-governmental organisation working globally on trade in wild animals and plants in the context of both biodiversity conservation and sustainable development.

the appendices of the Convention on the Conservation of Highly Migratory Species of Wild Animal (CMS) are also caught within the IOTC area and CPCs are required to implement those listings.

WWF and TRAFFIC support the measures currently adopted by IOTC for sharks. However, there are further actions which need to be addressed by the IOTC at its 2016 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 these recommendations for all of the IOTC;
2. Adopt a similar measure to that approved by the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) to support best practices for safe handling and release of manta rays (genus *Mobula* and *Manta*) aboard purse seiners;
3. 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;
4. Introduce a scheme to document the capture and trade of sharks whereby it allows for traceability through to the final market state;
5. 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;
6. Encourage the development of reference points and management for non-target species of all shark and ray species;
7. Adoption of an annual rolling requirement to use the Clarke and Nicol proposal for a Bycatch Data Exchange Protocol (IOTC-2015-WPEB11-41); and
8. Ensure the adopted CMMs for sharks and rays are complied with by all IOTC members.

Recommendation:

1. **Adopt the EU proposed amendments to Resolution 05/05 regarding shark fins being naturally attached (IOTC-2016-S20-PropD);**
2. **Endorse the draft MOU with CMS (IOTC-2016-S20-13); and**
3. **Ensure CPCs that have implemented total bans on catching and removal of sharks continue to be required to report sufficient data to determine the extent to which interactions and mortalities of sharks and rays are occurring and where mortalities are occurring the full array of species/size data continue to be reported.**

Second Performance Review

WWF supports the findings of the second Performance Review of the IOTC, which:

- evaluated progress made on the recommendations arising from the 1st performance review;
- focused on the effectiveness of the Commission to fulfil its mandate; and
- evaluated the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and risks to the organisation.

The Performance Review process is a critical tool for promoting positive change in the IOTC. Modernisation of the IOTC Agreement is due, and it is admirable that the Commission sought to reflect on how it can improve its science, governance, and compliance.

Recommendation: adopt a Resolution to deliberate on recommendations made by the panel of 2nd Performance Review to address all recommendations of the Performance Review Panel Report in an appropriate formation (proposal IOTC-2016-S20-PropU

Concluding Comment

WWF certainly understand 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.

Finally, WWF asks that the Commission take the opportunity presented by the proposals being tabled by some of its members to mark its 20th anniversary through taking the first steps toward a sustainable tuna industry.

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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