



**ON THE CONSERVATION OF MOBULA AND MANTA RAYS CAUGHT IN ASSOCIATION WITH
FISHERIES IN THE IOTC AREA OF COMPETENCE**

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Explanatory memorandum

The international scientific community strongly underlines the particular vulnerability of the family *Myliobatidae* which includes *Manta* and *Mobula* rays, species caught as a bycatch, particularly in purse seine fisheries operating in the Indian Ocean. They are among the least fecund of the world's sharks and rays and can be rapidly depleted by even low levels of fishing mortality.

Furthermore, the increasing level of shark and ray catches in the Indian Ocean may have an irreversible negative impact on the stock of the above mentioned species, justifying a precautionary approach in their management.

As a result, fishing vessels should be prohibited from retaining on board, transshipping, landing, storing, selling, or offering for sale any part of the above mentioned species. Guidance to facilitate the live release of these animals is included in Annex 1 of this resolution.

This approach has been taken up by the IATTC, who have adopted a measure in line with this resolution for purse seine vessels operating in their area of competence, and the WCPFC is in the process of considering a similar measure. Via this resolution IOTC will join this global effort to offer precautionary management to *Manta* and *Mobula* rays.

RESOLUTION 18/XX
**ON THE CONSERVATION OF MOBULA AND MANTA RAYS CAUGHT IN ASSOCIATION WITH
FISHERIES IN THE IOTC AREA OF COMPETENCE**

Keywords: Mobula Rays, Manta Rays, Conservation,

The Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC),

RECOGNISING Resolution 12/01 *On the implementation of the Precautionary Approach* calls on IOTC Contracting Parties and Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties to apply the precautionary approach when managing tuna and tuna-like species in accordance with Article V of the United Fish Stocks Agreement;

RECALLING IOTC Resolution 05/05 *concerning the conservation of sharks caught in association with fisheries managed by IOTC*;

CONSIDERING that the species of the family *Myliobatidae* which includes *Manta* and *Mobula* rays, are extremely vulnerable to overfishing as they take a long time to reach sexual maturity, have long gestation periods, and often give birth to only a few pups;

RECOGNISING the ecological and cultural significance of mobula and manta rays in the Indian Ocean;

CONCERNED about the possible impacts of purse seine fishing operations on the sustainability of mobula and manta rays, as well as other fishing activities, using driftnets and longlines in particular;

CONSIDERING that the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) International Plan of Action for Sharks calls on States to cooperate through regional fisheries management organizations to ensure the sustainability of shark and stocks;

CONCERNED by the lack of complete and accurate data reporting concerning fishing activities on non-targeted species;

RECOGNIZING the need to improve the collection of species-specific data on catch, catch rates, discards, and trade as a basis for improving the conservation and management of mobula and manta ray stocks;

NOTING that the IOTC Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch (WPEB) noted in paper IOTC-2016-WPEB12-29 that *Myliobatidae* species are caught in association with IOTC purse seine fisheries; that manta and mobula rays are now listed on the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES); and that material is also available on best practice guidelines for the safe handling and release of mobula and manta rays which are currently followed by 100% of the EU and Seychelles purse seine fleets.

FURTHER NOTING that the WPEB recognized that full stock assessments may not be possible because of data limitations and that it is essential that some stock assessment evaluation should be carried out;

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

1. Paragraph 2 – 4 of this measure shall apply to all fishing vessels flying the flag of a Contracting Party or Cooperating Non-Contracting Party (hereinafter referred to collectively as CPC) and on the IOTC record of fishing vessels or authorized to fish for tuna and tuna like species managed by the IOTC, except vessels that are less than 24 metres overall length that operate solely within the EEZ of the flag CPC that take *Manta* or *Mobula* rays exclusively for domestic consumption.

2. CPCs shall prohibit all vessels to which paragraphs 2 – 4 of this Resolution apply from intentionally setting any gear type known to catch Mantas or Mobula's (i.e. purse seine, gillnet), on a school of tuna associated with *Manta* or *Mobula* rays in the IOTC Area of Competence, if the animal is sighted prior to commencement of the set.
3. CPCs shall prohibit all vessels to which paragraphs 2 – 4 of this Resolution apply retaining onboard, transshipping, landing, storing, selling, or offering for sale any part or whole carcass of *Manta* and *Mobula* rays caught in the IOTC Area of Competence.
4. CPCs shall require all vessels to which paragraphs 2 – 4 of this Resolution apply to promptly release unharmed, to the extent practicable, *Manta* and *Mobula* rays as soon as they are seen in the net, on the hook, or on the deck, and do it in a manner that will result in the least possible harm to the individuals captured, following the guidance detailed in Annex 1 of this Resolution.
5. CPCs shall report the information and data collected on interactions (number of discards and releases) with *Manta* and *Mobula* Rays by vessels to which paragraph 2 – 4 of this Resolution apply, through logbooks, and through observer programs. The data shall be provided to the IOTC Secretariat by 30 June of the following year and according to the timelines specified in Resolution 15/02 (or any subsequent revision). In respect of vessels to which paragraphs 2 – 4 do not apply, CPCs are encouraged to provide this information and data to the IOTC Secretariat in the same time frame.
6. Scientific observers shall be allowed to collect biological samples of *Manta* and *Mobula* rays caught in the IOTC Area of Competence that are dead at haulback, provided that the samples are a part of a research project approved by the IOTC Scientific Committee (SC). In order to obtain the approval, a detailed document outlining the purpose of the work, number of samples intended to be collected and the spatio-temporal distribution of the sampling effect must be included in the proposal. Annual progress of the work and a final report on completion shall be presented to the SC.

ANNEX 1
Live release guidance

1. Prohibit the gaffing of rays.
2. Prohibit the lifting of rays by the gill slits or spiracles.
3. Prohibit the punching of holes through the bodies of rays (e.g. to pass a cable through for lifting the ray).
4. Rays too large to be lifted safely by hand should be, to the extent possible, brailed out of the net using best available method such as those recommended in document WCPFC-SC8-2012/EB-IP-12 (*Poison et al, 2012. Good practices to reduce the mortality of sharks and rays caught incidentally by the tropical tuna purse seiners*).
5. Large rays that cannot be released safely before being landed on deck, should be returned to the water as soon as possible, preferably utilizing a ramp from the deck connecting to an opening on the side of the boat, or if no such ramp is available, lowered with a sling or net.