



ON THE CONSERVATION OF MOBULIDS SPECIES¹ CAUGHT IN ASSOCIATION WITH FISHERIES IN THE IOTC AREA OF COMPETENCE

SUBMITTED BY: European Union

Explanatory memorandum

The international scientific community strongly underlines the particular vulnerability of the mobulid rays (i.e. manta rays and mobula rays), species caught, either as target or as bycatch, of different fisheries in coastal and offshore areas of the Indian Ocean.

They are big-size, slow-growing, high longevity, late maturity, low reproductive rates, amongst the least fecund of the world's elasmobranchs. They are mostly epipelagic species with fragmented and isolated populations found over deep waters as well as over continental shelves and that often aggregate in coastal shallow waters where they are therefore relatively easy to locate and exploit. They frequent singly, either in small groups or in schools, productive coastlines with regular upwelling often near oceanic islands and offshore pinnacles and seamounts. Their bio-ecological characteristics indicates that these species are likely to have a poor ability to withstand even low levels of fishing mortality.

Nonetheless, they are directly targeted or valuable by-catch species in small-scale fisheries and accidentally caught as bycatch in industrial fisheries. However, the magnitude of these interactions (particularly bycatch) is poorly documented although evidences of unprecedented decrease in landings of mobulid rays is recorded in different coastal countries of the Indian Ocean. Thus, they can be rapidly depleted by even low levels of fishing mortality exerted over their wide range of distribution justifying a precautionary approach in their management.

The IOTC Scientific Committee (SC21) recently noted the declines of these species across the Indian Ocean along with evidence of these species' interactions with pelagic fisheries, in particular tuna gillnet, purse seine and longline fisheries. The SC recommend that management actions, such as no-retention measures amongst other, are required and must be immediately adopted in advance of the 2020 reporting deadline indicated by the IOTC 22nd Session.

Moreover, they are listed in Appendix I and Appendix II of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) and the range States to a migratory species shall endeavour to strictly protect them. They are also listed in Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora for which trade shall be closely controlled under specific conditions including, *inter alia*, that trade will not be detrimental to the survival of the species in the wild.

As a result of above, fishing vessels, other than for subsistence² fishing, should be prohibited to catch these species and live release of unharmed specimens shall be implemented to the extent possible. In that respect, prohibition to retain on board, transshipping, landing, storing, selling, or offering for sale any part of the above-mentioned species, shall be implemented. Guidance to facilitate the live release of these animals is included in Annex 1 of this resolution.

This approach has been already taken up by the other RFMOs and via this Resolution, IOTC will join this global effort to offer precautionary management to mobulid rays.

¹Eagle, devil and manta rays.

² A subsistence fishery is a fishery where the fish caught are consumed directly by the families of the fishers rather than being bought by middle-(wo)men and sold at the next larger market, per the FAO Guidelines for the routine collection of capture fishery data. FAO Fisheries Technical Paper. No. 382. Rome, FAO. 1999. 113p.

**RESOLUTION xx/xx ON THE CONSERVATION OF MOBULID RAYS³ 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 5 of the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement and that, for sound fisheries management, such an approach applies also within areas under national jurisdiction;

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 Mobulidae, which includes manta rays and mobula rays (hereinafter mobulid rays), are extremely vulnerable to overfishing as they are slow-growing, late sexual maturity, have long gestation periods, and often give birth to only a few pups;

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

CONCERNED about the possible impacts on these species by the different fisheries occurring from coastal areas to the high seas;

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 sharks 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, release, discards, and trade as a basis for improving the conservation and management of mobulid rays stocks;

NOTING that the mobulid rays are listed in Appendix I and Appendix II of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) and the range States to a migratory species shall endeavour to strictly protect them.

FURTHER NOTING that the mobulid rays are also listed in Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) for which trade shall be closely controlled under specific conditions including, inter alia, that trade will not be detrimental to the survival of the species in the wild.

ACKNOWLEDGING that the Scientific Committee (SC21) recently noted the declines of these species across the Indian Ocean and RECOMMEND that management actions, such as no-retention measures amongst other, are required and must be immediately adopted.

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

³ Eagle, devil and manta rays

1. This Resolution shall apply to all fishing vessels flying the flag of a Contracting Party or Cooperating Non-Contracting Party (hereinafter referred to collectively as CPCs) and on the IOTC record of fishing vessels or authorized to fish for tuna and tuna like species managed by the IOTC.
2. CPCs shall prohibit all vessels from intentionally setting any gear type for targeted fishing of Mobulid rays in the IOTC Area of Competence, if the animal is sighted prior to commencement of the set.
3. CPCs shall prohibit all vessels retaining onboard, transshipping, landing, storing, selling, or offering for sale any part or whole carcass of Mobulid rays caught in the IOTC Area of Competence.
4. Provisions of paragraphs 2 and 3 above do not apply to fishing vessels carrying out subsistence fishery⁴ that, anyhow, shall not be selling or offering for sale any part or whole carcass of Mobulid rays.
5. CPCs shall require all their fishing vessels, other than those carrying out subsistence fishery, to promptly release alive and unharmed, to the extent practicable, Mobulid 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, while taking into consideration the safety of the crew. The handling guidelines, detailed in Annex 1 of this Resolution, shall be implemented and followed.
6. Notwithstanding paragraph 3, in the case of Mobulid rays that are unintentionally caught and frozen as part of a purse seine vessel's operation, the vessel must surrender the whole Mobulid ray to the responsible governmental authorities at the point of landing. Mobulid rays surrendered in this manner may not be sold or bartered but may be donated for purposes of domestic human consumption
7. CPCs shall report the information and data collected on interactions (i.e. number of discards and releases) with Mobulid Rays by vessels 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).
8. CPCs shall ensure that fishermen are aware of and use proper mitigation, identification, handling and releasing techniques and keep on board all necessary equipment for the release of Mobulid rays in accordance with the handling guidelines of Annex 1.
9. Recreational and sport fishing shall release alive all caught Mobulid rays and shall not be entitled to retaining onboard, transshipping, landing, storing, selling, or offering for sale any part or whole carcass of Mobulid rays.
10. CPCs shall develop statistically sound sampling plans for the monitoring of the Mobulid rays catches by the subsistence fisheries. The sampling plans can be implemented through a mix of different approaches, as considered scientifically adequate, including, inter alia, direct observations, questionnaires, interviews and reporting by the subsistence fishers.
11. The IOTC Scientific Committee is requested to provide, whenever considered adequate on the basis of evolving knowledge and scientific advice, further improvements to the handling guidelines detailed in Annex 1.
12. Scientific observers shall be allowed to collect biological samples of Mobulid 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

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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 handling guidelines

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.