

OUTCOMES OF THE 23rd SESSION OF THE COMMISSION

PREPARED BY: IOTC SECRETARIAT, 3RD AUGUST 2020

PURPOSE

To inform participants at the 18th Working Party on Billfish (WPB18) of the decision and requests made by the Commission at its 23rd Session, held from 17–21 June 2019, specifically relating to the work of the WPB. It must be noted that due to the global Covid pandemic, the 2020 session of the Commission (S24) has been postponed until November and so no new updates are available since 2019.

BACKGROUND

At the 23rd Session of the Commission, 7 Conservation and Management Measures were adopted, as detailed below:

Resolutions

- Resolution 19/01 On an interim plan for rebuilding the Indian Ocean yellowfin tuna stock in the IOTC Area of competence.
- Resolution 19/02 Procedures on a fish aggregating devices (FADs) management plan, including a limitation on the number of fads, more detailed specifications of catch reporting from fad sets, and the development of improved fad designs to reduce the incidence of entanglement of non-target species.
- Resolution 19/03 On the conservation of mobulid species caught in association with fisheries in the IOTC Area of Competence.
- Resolution 19/04 Concerning the IOTC Record of Vessels Authorised to operate in the IOTC Area of Competence.
- Resolution 19/05 On a ban on discards of bigeye tuna, skipjack tuna, yellowfin tuna, and non-targeted species caught by purse seine vessels in the IOTC Area of Competence.
- Resolution 19/06 On establishing a programme for transshipment by large-scale fishing vessels.
- Resolution 19/07 On vessel chartering in the IOTC Area of Competence.

These Conservation and Management Measures shall become binding 120 days after their distribution to all CPCs. The final versions of the newly agreed CMMs will be made available here in due course: <http://iotc.org/cmms>

DISCUSSION

The Commission also made a number of general comments on the recommendations made by the Scientific Committee in 2018, which have relevance for the WPB (IOTC–2018–S23–R):

Status of billfish

Swordfish

No new stock assessment was carried out for swordfish in 2018, thus, the stock status is determined on the basis of the 2017 assessment and other indicators presented in 2018. The stock is not overfished and not subject to overfishing. The most recent catches (31,407 t in 2015) are at the MSY level (31,590 t). However, given the uncertainty of most recent catches from Indonesian fresh tuna longline fisheries there is a possibility that total catches could already be 39,777 t. The catches should not be increased beyond the MSY level.

Striped Marlin

A new stock assessment for striped marlin was carried out in 2018, based on two different models. Both models were very consistent and confirmed the results from past assessments, indicating that the stock is subject to

overfishing ($F > F_{MSY}$) and overfished, with the biomass in the past ten years being below the level which would produce MSY ($B < B_{MSY}$). Current or increasing catches have a very high risk of resulting in a further decline in the stock status. If the Commission wishes to recover the stock to the green quadrant of the Kobe plot with a probability ranging from 60% to 90% by 2026, it needs to implement management measures to ensure the maximum annual catches remain between 1,500 t and 2,200 t.

Blue Marlin

A blue marlin assessment was carried out in 2016; however, the results were highly uncertain due to the paucity of catch data. According to the assessment, the stock is not overfished but subject to overfishing; and catches since 2012 has been above MSY. In order to achieve the Commission objectives, catches would have to be reduced by 24% compared to the average catch of 2013-2015, to a maximum value of 11,704 t.

Black Marlin

A new black marlin assessment was carried out in 2018. The Kobe plot from the JABBA assessment model indicated that the stock is not subject to overfishing and is currently not overfished; however, these status estimates have a high degree of uncertainty. The recent sharp increases in total catches and conflicts between CPUE and catch data lead to large uncertainties in the assessment outputs. This caused the point estimate of the stock status to change from the red to the green zones of the Kobe plot without any evidence of a rebuilding trend. As such, the results of the assessment are uncertain and should be interpreted with caution.

Indo-Pacific sailfish

An Indo-Pacific sailfish assessment was carried out in 2015. The stock is not considered to be overfished but is subject to overfishing. The advice to management is for catches to be limited to below the MSY of 25,000 t.

Consideration of management measures related to Billfish

The Commission **EXPRESSED** concern that catches for all billfish species (except striped marlin in 2017) in both 2016 and 2017 were higher than the limits outlined in Resolution 18/05.

The complete report of the 23rd Session of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission is available for download from the IOTC website: <http://www.iotc.org/sites/default/files/documents/2019/06/IOTC-2019-S23-RE.pdf>

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the WPB

- 1) **NOTE** paper IOTC-2020-WPB18-04 which outlined the outcomes of the 23rd Session of the Commission, specifically related to the work of the WPB and **AGREE** to consider how best to provide the SC with the information it needs, in order to satisfy the Commission's requests, throughout the course of the current WPB meeting.
- 2) **NOTE** the 7 Conservation and Management Measures (CMMs) adopted at the 23rd Session of the Commission (consisting of 7 Resolutions and 0 Recommendations).