

INDIAN OCEAN TUNA COMMISSION (IOTC), VIRTUAL SPECIAL MEETING, MARCH 8-12, 2021

The impacts of COVID-19 continue to present challenges to regional fisheries management organizations in conducting meetings. In 2020, the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) cancelled its in-person Commission and Working Party meetings. These meetings took place virtually. In March 2021, the IOTC Special Session will also be virtual.

Even under these challenging circumstances, IOTC must ensure the uninterrupted, sustainable management of the tuna stocks and marine ecosystems under its purview. In particular, there are several critical measures and issues that require immediate attention by IOTC this year.

This Statement focuses on those critical measures and issues on which IOTC must take action at its Special Session to be held in March 2021, which align with the ISSF global priorities for tuna RFMOs.

Tuna Conservation & Management

What are the issues?

Yellowfin tuna remains overfished and subject to overfishing and its catches continue to increase despite the recovery plan and catch reductions agreed in Resolution 19/01. The catches of skipjack tuna continue to increase and are higher than the agreed harvest control rule. Bigeye and albacore stocks are subject to overfishing. There are no complete management procedures in place for any key IOTC species.

Why are we concerned?

Non-compliance with Resolution 19/01 for an interim rebuilding plan for the Indian Ocean yellowfin tuna stock is likely resulting in a yellowfin catch increase. Moreover, the rebuilding plan adopted in Resolution 19/01 allows for growth in some fishery sectors and did not give full effect to the advice of the IOTC Scientific Committee. Skipjack catches were higher than the agreed annual quota. Thus, considering all the above, ISSF remains concerned of further possible declines in the yellowfin and skipjack stocks. ISSF also remains worried about continued inaction to arrest the overfishing of other key IOTC species such as bigeye, albacore, some neritic tuna and billfish species that have been assessed to be overfished and/or undergoing overfishing. These IOTC fisheries will experience further declines in stock status if no management actions are agreed.

Our Top Asks for IOTC at its Special Session:

1. Given the serious risk of further declines in the status of the yellowfin stock, adopt without delay an effective rebuilding plan for yellowfin tuna that gives full effect to the advice of the IOTC Scientific Committee.
2. Address over-catches in contravention of Res. 19/01 On an Interim Plan for Rebuilding for the Indian Ocean Yellowfin Tuna Stock.
3. Urgently monitor and manage catches of skipjack to ensure catches in 2021 do not exceed the limit set by the adopted Harvest Control Rule in Resolution 16/02.

What is ISSF asking IOTC to do?

(1) Given the serious risk of further declines in the status of the yellowfin stock, adopt without delay in 2021 an effective rebuilding plan for yellowfin tuna that gives full effect to the advice of the IOTC Scientific Committee and achieves spawning stock biomass capable of producing MSY (SSB_{MSY}) by 2027 with at least 50% probability, ensuring all gears/fleets harvesting yellowfin are taken into account to improve rebuilding potential of Resolution 19/01. If implemented effectively, this would imply a 15%-20% reduction from the 2017 yellowfin catch levels. In addition, IOTC needs to address over-catches in contravention of Res. 19/01.

(2) Ensure Contracting Party and Cooperating Non-Contracting Party (CPC) compliance with the rebuilding plan through the IOTC Compliance Committee.

(3) Urgently monitor and manage catches of skipjack to ensure catches in 2021 do not exceed the limit set by the adopted Harvest Control Rule in Resolution 16/02.

ISSF Global Priorities for Tuna RFMOs

Implementation of rigorous management procedures, including harvest control rules and reference points

Effective management of fleet capacity, including developing mechanisms that support developing coastal state engagement in the fishery

Science-based FAD management & non-entangling and biodegradable FAD designs

Increased member compliance with all measures adopted, and greater transparency of processes reviewing member compliance with measures

Strengthened Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS) measures and increased observer coverage, including through modern technologies such as electronic monitoring and e-reporting

Adoption of best-practice bycatch mitigation and shark conservation and management measures

Did you know?

50% of the IOTC tuna catch is landed by small scale and artisanal fleets.

Unfortunately, IOTC lags other RFMOs on data collection and reporting as well as on requiring 100% purse seine observer coverage.

ISSF is leading research on biodegradable FADs in the IO in collaboration with IO fleets, IOTC member countries, coastal nations, and other stakeholders.

ISSF also offers [guidelines for implementing non-entangling and biodegradable FADs](#).

Three [ISSF conservation measures](#) focus on shark bycatch mitigation.



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