



BLUE AND IPNLF POSITION STATEMENT IN ADVANCE OF THE SPECIAL SESSION OF THE INDIAN OCEAN TUNA COMMISSION

12 February 2021

Background

Yellowfin tuna in the Indian Ocean is overfished and subject to continued overfishing, with scientists warning that the stock could collapse within the next five years if fishing pressure is not reduced¹. A stock rebuilding plan was put in place by the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) in 2016 to significantly reduce catches, based on 2014 catch levels. However, this has proved ineffective, with catches increasing by over 5% between 2014 and 2019.

Additionally, there is an urgent need to improve the management of fish aggregating devices (FADs) in the Indian Ocean, primarily to reduce catches of juvenile tropical tunas, but also to help mitigate other ecological impacts associated with FADs, including marine plastic pollution, ghost fishing and the bycatch of turtles, sharks and marine mammals.

A Special Session of the Commission is being held virtually from 8-12 March 2021 to deal with the sustainability of the yellowfin tuna fishery.

Recommendations

Blue Marine Foundation (BLUE) and the International Pole and Line Foundation (IPNLF) hereby confirm their support for, and encourage the adoption of, the following two conservation and management measure (CMM) proposals:

- IOTC-2021-SS4-PropC “On an interim plan for rebuilding the Indian Ocean yellowfin tuna stock in the IOTC area of competence”, submitted by Maldives²; and
- IOTC-2021-SS4-PropD “On management of fish aggregating devices in the IOTC area of competence”, submitted by Kenya and Sri Lanka³.

The Maldives’ proposal calls for a 15% reduction in yellowfin tuna catches from 2015 levels, in line with the last reliable stock assessment and associated management advice. It presents a new target of 346,438 tonnes, partly by eliminating the exemptions provided for in Resolution 19/01. The EU’s proposal – the only other proposed stock rebuilding plan CMM – also removes these exemptions, but

¹ <https://www.bluemarinefoundation.com/2020/04/06/leading-scientists-take-on-eu-over-yellowfin-overfishing/>

² <https://iotc.org/documents/interim-plan-rebuilding-indian-ocean-yellowfin-tuna-stock-iotc-area-competence-maldives>

³ <https://iotc.org/documents/management-fish-aggregating-devices-fads-iotc-area-competence-kenya-sri-lanka>

the overall catch reduction is far below what is required to recover the stock in the necessary timeframe.

Given the uncertainty and ambiguity contained within the IOTC Scientific Committee's most recent report⁴, **this 15% reduction in catch is the absolute minimum that our two organisations can support.**

The proposal by Kenya and Sri Lanka aims to reduce the number of drifting FADs per vessel from 300 to 150, calls for greater transparency in how these FADs are deployed, tracked and retrieved, and further calls for a three-month ban on fishing around drifting FADS and a phasing out of supply vessels.

We encourage the heads of delegation of all IOTC member states to use these proposals as the minimum baseline on which to base negotiations during the Special Session in March.

⁴ See: <https://www.blumarinefoundation.com/2021/01/29/iotc-takes-step-back-on-yellowfin-tuna-recovery-plan/>