

## **INDIAN OCEAN TUNA COMMISSION (IOTC), VIRTUAL COMMISSION MEETING, JUNE 7-11, 2021**

The impacts of COVID-19 continue to present challenges to regional fisheries management organizations in conducting meetings. Even under these challenging circumstances, IOTC must ensure the uninterrupted, sustainable management of the tuna stocks and marine ecosystems under its purview. 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 in 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?**

Nearly one half of the catches of yellowfin tuna are exempt from limits in Resolution 19/01. While some CPCs/gear groups bound by the Resolution have already achieved needed reductions, others have increased their catches since the rebuilding plan was first adopted. In addition, there has been non-compliance by some CPCs who are bound by the catch limitations. For all these reasons, the rebuilding plan has been ineffective. Regrettably, the IOTC failed to reach agreement on a revised yellowfin rebuilding plan at its Special Session in March 2021. The yellowfin stock is likely to experience further declines in stock status if science-based and enforceable management actions are not agreed at the Commission Meeting in June. Skipjack catches were higher than the agreed annual quota. Thus, ISSF remains concerned of further possible declines in the yellowfin and skipjack stocks. ISSF also remains worried about continued IOTC inaction to arrest the overfishing of other key species such as bigeye, albacore, some neritic tuna and billfish species that have been assessed to be overfished and/or undergoing overfishing. Further, the continued use of large-scale driftnets in the IOTC area of competence is a serious conservation issue. Since 2010, ISSF Conservation Measure 3.2 has required that processors, traders, importers, transporters, marketers and others involved in the seafood industry refrain from transactions in tuna caught by large-scale pelagic driftnets.

#### **Our Top Asks:**

1. Because the IOTC failed to reach agreement on a revised yellowfin rebuilding plan at its Special Session in March 2021, adopt without delay an effective rebuilding plan for yellowfin tuna which, if implemented effectively, would imply a reduction to a total catch between 350,000 and 403,000 tonnes; and address over-catches in contravention of Resolution 19/01.
2. Urgently monitor and manage catches of skipjack to ensure catches in 2021 do not exceed the limit set by the adopted Harvest Control Rule.
3. Accelerate the develop Management Procedures and agree on permanent Limit and Target Reference Points for tropical and temperate tunas, particularly yellowfin, by 2022.
4. Request the Scientific Committee to provide science-based limits on FAD deployments and/or FAD sets; develop in 2021 and adopt, by 2022, FAD marking guidelines and FAD tracking and recovery policies; and require the use of biodegradable materials in the construction of FADs and establish a timeline for transitioning to 100% biodegradable.
5. Establish the Working Group on Electronic Monitoring (EM) and develop EM program minimum standards by 2022. Require 100% observer coverage (human and/or electronic) in industrial tuna fisheries, including all those engaged in at sea transshipment, by 2024.

## 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, which, if implemented effectively, would imply a reduction to a total catch between 350,000 and 403,000 tonnes. The more that catches are reduced, the faster the rebuilding is expected to be. IOTC also needs to address over-catches in contravention of Res. 19/01 and account for differential catch reduction treatment based on performance and achievement of Resolution 19/01 goals.
- (2) Ensure that any new measure to replace Res. 19/01 includes all gears/fleets, regardless of vessel size and area of activity, harvesting yellowfin to remove existing exemptions and improve the effectiveness of the Resolution.
  - ***Should IOTC fail to adopt a measure to effectively implement the most recent IOTC SC advice, the ISSF Board has adopted ISSF CM 1.3 (<https://iss-foundation.org/what-we-do/verification/conservation-measures-commitments/rfmo-support-1-3-iotc-yellowfin-tuna-rebuilding/>) that would require ISSF Participating Companies to reduce sourcing of Indian Ocean origin yellowfin tuna by 11% calculated with respect to the company's average annual level of Indian Ocean yellowfin purchases from 2017-2019.***
- (3) Ensure CPC compliance with the rebuilding plan through the IOTC Compliance Committee.
- (4) 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.
- (5) Ensure CPC compliance with the prohibition on the use of large-scale driftnets on the high seas and urge accelerated implementation of Res. 17/07 that prohibits the use of such driftnets in the entire IOTC area of competence.

## Management Procedures (Harvest Strategies)

### What are the issues?

Management Procedures (also called Harvest Strategies) — which include target and limit reference points together with harvest control rules— provide pre-agreed rules acting on stock status changes for managing fisheries resources.

### Why are we concerned?

Although the IOTC has been slowly progressing the development of management procedures, it has not yet agreed on a complete management procedure for any of the key IOTC species.

## What is ISSF asking IOTC to do?

- (1) Accelerate action on developing comprehensive, precautionary Management Procedures, and agree on permanent Limit and Target Reference Points for tropical and temperate tunas, particularly yellowfin, by 2022.
- (2) Conduct Management Strategy Evaluations (MSE) for albacore, bigeye, skipjack and yellowfin tuna stocks.

## FAD and Supply Vessel Management

### What are the issues?

Fish aggregating devices (FAD) sets account for nearly 31% of tropical tuna catches and 39% of skipjack catches in the Indian Ocean. The collection of data on FAD type, usage, and the catch associated with a set supports improved understanding of changes in fishing capacity, likely impacts on IOTC stocks and the development of science-based FAD management measures. While supply vessels increase the availability of FADs to fishing vessels, they can also become an integral part of FAD recovery programs.

### Why are we concerned?

In the Indian Ocean, a concerted effort is needed to better monitor FAD usage and to support the adoption of science-based FAD related management measures. In the IO, shark and non-target species bycatch and other ecosystem impacts, such as marine debris and FAD beaching, need to be reduced. Using non-entangling and biodegradable FAD designs is a critical step to achieving that.

## What is ISSF asking IOTC to do?

- (1) Request the Scientific Committee to provide science-based limits on FAD deployments and/or FAD sets.
- (2) Require the use of biodegradable materials in the construction of FADs to minimize use of synthetic/plastic materials in FAD construction and establish a timeline for transitioning to 100% biodegradable.
- (3) Develop in 2021 and adopt, by 2022, FAD marking guidelines, including requiring the marking of the buoy and the FAD structure.
- (4) Develop in 2021 and adopt, by 2022 FAD tracking and recovery policies, as called for in Res.19/02 and consider utilizing supply vessels in FAD recovery policies and efforts.

## Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS)

### OBSERVER COVERAGE AND ELECTRONIC MONITORING

#### What are the issues?

Comprehensive observer coverage is critical to effective fisheries management, compliance monitoring, and independent verification of catch, effort and species interactions (e.g., sharks, sea turtles, and cetaceans).

#### Why are we concerned?

The IOTC lags far behind other RFMOs observer coverage rates. Resolution 11/04 only requires 5% observer coverage irrespective of the gear and/or area of operation. Observer coverage must be increased to strengthen data collection, including of rare species interactions and events, and to ensure rigorous compliance monitoring. While the IOTC has endorsed minimum electronic monitoring (EM) standards for purse seine vessels, it has not yet adopted them for all gear types or carrier vessels.

#### What is ISSF asking IOTC to do?

- (1) Establish the ad-hoc Working Group on Electronic Monitoring (EM) Program Standards recommended by the IOTC Science Committee and develop EM program minimum standards by 2022.
- (2) Require 100% observer coverage (human and/or electronic) in industrial tuna fisheries, including supply vessels and all those engaged in at sea transshipment, by 2024.
- (3) Adopt a binding measure that will ensure the safety of human observers, including those on supply and carrier vessels

### TRANSSHIPMENT

#### What are the issues?

To better manage transshipment and combat Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing activities, deficiencies and loopholes must be addressed in the IOTC's [Resolution 19/06](#) on transshipment.

#### Why are we concerned?

At-sea transshipment has been linked to IUU fishing activities and labor abuses when monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) measures are insufficient. At-sea transshipment continues to expand in the IOTC. Since 2014, at-sea transshipments have nearly doubled (from 703 in 2014 to 1317 in 2019).

#### What is ISSF asking IOTC to do?

Undertake a thorough review of the at-sea transshipment resolution and amend the Resolution to:

- (a) Require authorized carrier vessels to be flagged to IOTC CPCs or CNMs.
- (b) Require that all reporting is undertaken in near real-time, but no greater than 24 hours after the event.
- (c) Require all vessels to submit transshipment declarations to both the flag State and the IOTC Secretariat for all transshipments.
- (d) Require flag States to report annually to the Secretariat the vessels they have granted prior authorization to transship at sea.

### VMS AND PORT STATE MEASURES

## What are the issues?

Fisheries management relies on the adoption and implementation of effective MCS tools to detect non-compliance and IUU fishing. MCS tools include technologies and programs such as satellite Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS) and port monitoring.

## Why are we concerned?

IOTC's current VMS program is not centralized, and compliance with the existing requirements is low. The IOTC formed a VMS Working Group but it has not yet met. The 2021 Meeting of the IOTC Working Party on Implementation of Conservation expressed serious concerns over the slow progress of the VMS Working Group. IOTC's Resolution on Port State Measures (16/11) is not aligned with the FAO Agreement on Port State Measures in several key areas, which undermines its effectiveness.

## What is ISSF asking IOTC to do?

- (1) Ensure the VMS Working Group meets in 2021 to consider the recommendations of the VMS Consultancy and VMS Steering Committee to strengthen the IOTC VMS, including consideration of a centralized program with greater data sharing.
- (2) Amend Res. 16/11 to prioritize vessels for inspection in port and expand the measure to include ports of CPCs that are outside of the IOTC Convention Area.

## Bycatch and Sharks

### What are the issues?

Science-based conservation and management measures to limit fishing mortality on non-target species such as sharks, turtles and seabirds, must be adopted and implemented. Data collection and reporting is essential to support the adoption of bycatch mitigation measures based on the best available science and the precautionary approach. The paucity of data on shark catches and interactions with non-target species prevents assessments and hinders the provision of scientific advice and effective management.

### Why are we concerned?

Even with the limited data on sharks available, it is clear that the abundance of some species is declining. While the IOTC does not have a clear mandate to manage shark fisheries, it must take action to mitigate the impact of tuna fisheries on shark populations. In addition, the IOTC Resolutions on sea turtles and seabird conservation are outdated and do not include new mitigation techniques.

### What is ISSF asking IOTC to do?

- (1) Adopt sufficient measures to limit fishing mortality on sharks, as recommended by the IOTC Scientific Committee.
- (2) Strengthen IOTC Resolution 17/05 on shark finning by requiring that all sharks be landed with fins naturally attached.
- (3) Amend Resolution 12/04 on turtle conservation and amend Resolution 12/06 on seabird conservation, as previously recommended by the Scientific Committee, to include scientifically proven mitigation measures and devices, require identification to species level, and improve the minimum observer data requirements.
- (4) Adopt Best Practices for the Safe Release of Sharks, including the use of safe release devices, like those adopted by the WCPFC and IATTC.

## Compliance Processes

### What are the issues?

A strong compliance process improves fisheries management by holding CPCs accountable.

### Why are we concerned?

IOTC Compliance Committee reports indicate there is significant CPC non-compliance and gaps in implementation with a range of IOTC measures, which reduces the effectiveness of IOTC conservation and management measures and the IOTC.

### What is ISSF asking IOTC to do?

- (1) Require that CPCs submit a compliance action plan, such as those from Compliance Missions, that addresses identified areas of non-compliance and outlines a plan for improvements

(2) Adopt a workplan to develop a scheme of responses to non-compliance.

(3) Using mandatory data collected by CPCs in accordance with Resolutions 15/01, 15/02, and 19/02, ensure compliance with FAD data reporting and limits and ensure that the FAD data collected are made available to the Scientific Committee.

## 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 and bycatch mitigation.

Two [ISSF conservation measures](#) focus on FAD management.



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