



South West Indian Ocean Tuna Forum (SWIOTUNA)

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POSITION STATEMENT BY SWIOTUNA TO THE 26TH SESSION OF THE INDIAN OCEAN TUNA COMMISSION (IOTC) TO BE HELD IN VICTORIA, SYCHELLES, 16TH – 20TH MAY 2022

Who we are? The South West Indian Ocean Tuna Forum (SWIOTUNA)

The South West Indian Ocean Tuna Forum (SWIOTUNA) is a regional umbrella CSO organization that has been in existence as a network since 2010. In 2016, SWIOTUNA members in their annual general meeting (AGM) held in Mombasa, Kenya resolved to register the network as a regional entity. SWIOTUNA was registered in May 2019 as a regional Not for Profit Organization under the laws of the Republic of Kenya with its Headquarters currently based in Nairobi. The forum provides a capacity building opportunity to the CSOs and other Non-State Actors (NSA) working on marine and fisheries related issues to advocate for sustainable use, development and management of marine fisheries in the SWIO region states with a view to ensuring that the respective countries and local communities derive more socio-economic benefits from their fisheries resources. SWIOTUNA as an umbrella organization for the Civil Society Organizations in the SWIO region is keen to see the IOTC member states, in particular the coastal and island states derive more sustainable benefits from their shared tuna resources. We are aware that the SWIO countries offer fishing opportunities to Distant Water Fishing Nations through some form of access arrangements

Since its establishment, SWIOTUNA and her members have been working closely with the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) Secretariat and members through a collaborative arrangement. SWIOTUNA also work closely with other key players in the sector who stand to benefit from the sustainable management of tuna resources.

SWIOTUNA commends the IOTC members for the good progress they have made towards the implementation of tuna conservation and management measures. However, we take note of the slow progress made towards achieving the compliance that will ensure that tuna stocks are managed and harvested at sustainable levels with a view to increasing the socio-economic returns to the respective countries in the Indian Ocean region, more specifically the Coastal and Indian Ocean Island States.

SWIOTUNA extends our gratitude to the IOTC for granting us the observer status and wishes to emphasize the following key issues and associated recommendations to the 26th Session of the IOTC.

1. Quota allocation

SWIOTUNA takes note of the ongoing discussions on Quota allocation criteria for the tuna resources in the IOTC area of competency. Allocation of fishing rights in international fisheries management is a highly complex and often contentious issue that is not easily resolved. The 14th Session of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) held in Busan, South Korea in March 2010 expressed concern of the declining tuna

stocks, in particular yellowfin tuna in the IOTC area of competence. One of the key outcomes of the Busan meeting was the establishment of the Technical Committee on Allocation Criteria (TCAC). The TCAC among others was to develop tuna allocation criteria and recommend to IOTC members the allocation quota system for yellowfin tuna and bigeye tunas. The allocation quota system was to come into effect on 1st January 2012.

Discussing the issue of catch quotas for member countries has not been an easy task. Since the Busan meeting in 2010, a total of 9 Sessions for the TCAC have been held without much tangible outcomes. The 9th Session of the IOTC Technical Committee on Allocation Criteria was held virtually from 2 to 4 November 2021. SWIOTUNA is particularly concerned with the slow pace of concluding the discussions on allocation criteria and the implementation of the allocation quota system especially for the yellowfin and bigeye tunas.

SWIOTUNA urges IOTC to sustain their efforts of determining the appropriate criteria for quota allocation and implement the quota system for tuna conservation as soon as possible by December 2022 in line with the recommendation of the 9th Session of the Technical Committee on Allocation Criteria and the 24th Session of the Scientific Committee held in December 2021.

Given the characteristics of Indian Ocean tuna fisheries, special attention must be given to the needs of small-scale fisheries, fishing dependent communities and the aspirations of the Coastal and Island States to derive more benefits to their tuna resources in their respective Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ).

2. Yellowfin tuna stock rebuilding plan

SWIOTUNA welcome the efforts by the IOTC to rebuild the yellowfin tuna stocks which are overfished. We recognize the Commission efforts in implementing an interim plan for rebuilding the Indian Ocean yellowfin tuna stock in the IOTC Area of Competence which came into effect January 2017 to achieve the recovery of yellowfin stock.

The objective of the 2016 interim plan was to reduce the catches by 20% of the 2014 levels and to recover the stock to levels above the interim target reference points with 50% probability by 2024, as per the Scientific Committee advice of 2015. The IOTC members have consistently failed to achieve the catch reductions over the years. IOTC has been amending the initial resolution on yellowfin tuna stock rebuilding (16/01), and subsequently resolutions 17/01, 18/01, 19/01. IOTC in 2021 adopted resolution 21/01 on yellowfin tuna stock rebuilding which supersedes the previous resolutions/plans. The resolution provides overall framework for reduction of yellowfin tuna catches by the IOTC member states. Unfortunately fishing effort and catches for yellowfin tuna keeps on increasing hence the issue of compliance with Tuna Conservation and Management Measures by the IOTC members.

SWIOTUNA supports recommendations by the IOTC member states and other proponents that yellowfin tuna catches should be reduced by over 20% based on the 2017 catch levels, and effectively monitored. SWIOTUNA stresses the need for effective monitoring from Contracting Parties Countries (CPCs) in order to ensure that they do not exceed total allowable catches (Maximum Sustainable Yield [MSY]) and that they limit the fishing effort for tuna stocks, implement the precautionary approach and develop

appropriate schemes for the adoption of management measures as we await the adoption of the equitable allocation scheme.

SWIOTUNA further endorses the recommendations of the 24th Session of the IOTC Scientific Committee on independent assessment of the yellowfin tuna, bigeye and skipjack tunas in order to remove any uncertainties on the stock status.

3. Compliance with IOTC Tuna Conservation and Management Measures

SWIOTUNA is concerned that over the years IOTC has been developing and adopting decisions aimed at promoting sustainable development, conservation and management of tuna resources within the IOTC area of competency. Unfortunately, compliance with a large proportion of these has been low. The tuna stocks continue to decline while the fishing effort is on the increase despite the resolutions to limit catches adopted by the IOTC. The principal tropical tuna species in the IOTC area are experiencing high fishing pressure. Average catch for Albacore tuna for the period 2016–2020 was 38,781t hence exceeded the MSY of 35,700t per year. The stock is therefore subject to overfishing. The 2019 stock assessment by IOTC indicated that bigeye tuna stock is subject to overfishing though the catch of 83,498 t in 2020 was slightly below the MSY of 87,000 t per year. The Skipjack tuna stock assessment report (2020) indicated that the stocks were healthy, the IOTC Scientific Committee expressed concern that the catch limits over the past years have been exceeded. The yellowfin tuna stock in the Indian Ocean is in the red. The 2021 stock assessment report indicated that yellowfin tuna catch in 2020 was 432,624t as opposed to the MSY of 349,000t. The report indicates that yellowfin tuna stock remain overfished and subject to overfishing. The weight of evidence here is clear, tuna species, including neritic tunas and billfishes have been assessed to be overfished or are being overfished. It is anticipated that if robust measures are not put in place, these stocks will decline.

SWIOTUNA encourages all CPCs to recognize the importance and implication of these measures in ensuring stock sustainability and socio-economic benefits. The 24th Session of the IOTC Scientific Committee indicated that nine (9) IOTC member states didn't comply with the IOTC reporting requirement. The sustainability and future of tuna stocks in the Indian Ocean depend on the level of conservation and management measures implemented effectively and efficiently by the IOTC member states. SWIOTUNA urges IOTC members to work toward strengthening national and regional compliance with the adopted IOTC Conservation and Management Measures. The IOTC Secretariat should continue with their efforts to help member states to improve their level of compliance through support mission. IOTC should consider adopting and implementing stringent measures for non-compliance.



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