



WWF POSITION for the 6th Special Session of the IOTC

WWF Ocean Practice
3-5 February 2023

IOTC-2023-SS6-NGO

As the second-most productive ocean, the Indian Ocean supports the second-largest tuna fishery in the world, with over 1 million tonnes caught, essential for sustenance of billions of people in the coastal communities in the Indian Ocean Region. Despite the vital importance of this fishery, overfishing continues to occur, as the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission determined that three out of the four key species of tuna (albacore, bigeye, and yellowfin) are fished above their biological limits, whereas, skipjack tuna are fished above the harvest control limit established by the IOTC. The Indian Ocean region lacks effective management of FADs (anchored and/or drifting, others) in terms of effort and verification. The FAD measures are currently included in Resolution 19/02, and its outcomes were reviewed by the Commission in 2021 and 2022 in hope of adoption of a revised plan. It is critical for the CPCs to assess the effectiveness of the FAD measures under Resolution 19/02, ensuring that all provisions have been implemented and are viable in improving stock health. WWF urges all CPCs to develop strengthen conservation and management measures for FADs aiming to reduce the negative ecological impact on habitats and high fishing mortality of juvenile yellowfin tuna. The Indian Ocean FAD-associated purse seine fishery has a very high percentage of juvenile yellowfin tuna catch (around 25%¹) compared to the global average (around 16%) for all other purse seine FAD-based fisheries. The purse seine fishery contributes to 52% of the yellowfin tuna and 77% of the bigeye tuna juveniles caught in the Indian Ocean from 2014 – 2021. WWF urges all CPCs as a matter of urgency, recognising the state of tuna stocks in the Indian Ocean, to adopt the following priorities² at the 6th Special Session of the Commission in February 2023:

- Reduce the use of drifting FADs, using a precautionary approach and agreeing to adopt a FAD limit of 100 operational FADs per fishing vessel at any given time in the high seas.
- Monitor the impacts on other tuna, and evaluate implications on stock health (i.e. how SSB is impacted by high fishing mortality on juvenile yellowfin tuna) due to excessive use of FADs (drifting/anchored) that could lead to further overfishing of yellowfin tuna.
- Ensure full transparency of dFAD and aFAD operations, including submission of all data transmitted by operational buoys to an independent third party in near real-time, including verification and ownership, numbers, position from deployment until retrieval, species composition recorded by its size and weight, and reporting by set data for making scientific analysis more robust and adequate.
- Minimise their impacts on ETP species and broader ghost fishing impacts, no netting should be permitted in dFAD designs and all the materials used in the construction of dFADs should be fully biodegradable by the end of 2023, and ensure that 100% of all FADs deployed be retrieved.
- Agree to FAD closures in the high seas for at least a four-month period, while ensuring, i) Purse seine vessels shall not operate under manual reporting during the FADs closure periods, and must return to port until normal automatic reception of VMS positions is re-established, ii) All purse seine vessels fishing solely within national jurisdictions must carry an observer, iii) Regional Observer Programme reports for trips taken during FADs closure period shall be given priority for data input and analysis, and iv) VMS polling frequency shall be increased to every 30 minutes during the FAD closure period.

WWF³ calls on CPCs to ensure that an improved FAD (anchored/drifted) management proposal is adopted, which takes into account the above priorities. WWF is seriously concerned with the current management of FADs in the Indian Ocean and the impact it has on ecosystems and co-dependent/associated tuna stocks.

¹ Is it good or bad to fish with FADs? What are the real impacts of the use of drifting FADs on pelagic marine ecosystems? Laurent Dagorn, Kim N. Holland, Victor Restrepo & Gala Moreno. FISH and FISHERIES, 2013, 14, 391–415

² Priorities and details of WWF position shared publicly on 7 May 2022 at the 26th Session of the Commission held from 16-20 May 2022 in Seychelles (<https://iotc.org/documents/wwf-position>)

³ For any queries or clarifications contact, Umair Shahid, Indian Ocean Tuna Manager (ushahid@wwf.org.pk), WWF