Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC)
27th Annual Meeting, May 8–12, 2023

This Position Statement outlines issues that we urge the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) to act on at its upcoming meeting.

COMPLIANCE PROCESSES

2023 Asks

- Compliance Committee must address CPC non-compliance with the provision of mandatory fishery and FAD data, catch and FAD limits and use of gillnets
- Require CPCs to submit action plans that address identified non-compliance

Background

A strong compliance process improves fisheries management by holding CPCs accountable. IOTC Compliance Committee reports show significant CPC non-compliance with IOTC measures, which reduces their effectiveness. ISSF and Pew Charitable Trusts have recommendations to improve RFMO compliance processes in workshop reports: 2020 report, 2021 report, 2022 report.

Priorities to Progress

- Develop a scheme for responses to CPC non-compliance

RFMO Compliance Information & Resources

TUNA STOCK CONSERVATION

2023 Asks

- Adopt amendments to Res. 21/01 to reduce yellowfin tuna catches by at least 22% (relative to the 2020 level) following latest IOTC SC management advice.
- Ensure skipjack catches in 2023 do not exceed limit set by Harvest Control Rule (HCR) in Res. 21/03 (513,572 t.)
- Ensure bigeye catches do not exceed limit set by Management Procedure in Res. 22/03

Background

Since 2014-2015, the Indian Ocean tropical tuna total catch has increased around 25%, despite IOTC's yellowfin rebuilding plan (2016), skipjack HCR and annual quota (2018) — highlighting the ineffectiveness of catch limits and management measures.

Yellowfin is overfished, subject to overfishing, and — without agreement on science-based, enforceable actions — likely to experience further declines. IOTC's Scientific Committee (SC) advised it would recover to SSB_{MSY} by 2030 with (1) 50% probability if catches decreased at least 22% (from 2020 levels) or (2) 67% probability with a 30% reduction.

Skipjack catches in 2018-2021 exceeded the HCR limit, reaching a record-high 650,311 tons in 2021, a 19% increase from 2020.

Bigeye is overfished and subject to overfishing; catches increased 17% since 2018. Res. 22/03 on bigeye Management Procedure recommended a TAC of 80,583 tons per year for 2024-2025, which requires a 15% catch reduction from the 2021 catch level.

Priorities to Progress

- Cooperate in order to adopt allocated catch limits and effective management measures to reduce overall catch and fishing mortality for the three tropical tunas
- Ensure contracting parties (CPCs) comply with yellowfin rebuilding plans and address over-catches
- Ensure CPCs comply with prohibition on large-scale driftnets on high seas and accelerate implementation of Res. 17/07

Tuna Conservation Information & Resources

FAD MANAGEMENT

2023 Ask

Build upon the measures in Resolution 23/02 on Management of drifting FADs (provisions on FAD marking guidelines, a timeline for transition to biodegradable FADs, and access to FAD position data for science needs) by adopting the following:

- Require the Scientific Committee to provide advice on FAD management options, including the efficacy of FAD closures, and expected reductions of juvenile and total catch of tropical tunas in comparison to the contribution of other gears
- A requirement to report complete FAD acoustic biomass records from echosounder buoys for scientific use
- FAD tracking and recovery policies, as called for in Res.19/02
- Clearer rules for FAD activation and deactivation of FAD buoys

Background

In 2017-2021, FAD sets accounted for nearly 35% of tropical tuna catches (45% of skipjack, 24% of yellowfin, and 27% of bigeye) in the Indian Ocean. Comprehensive FAD management will help to manage fishing pressure, reduce the catch on the three tropical tuna stocks, and lower other ecosystem impacts.

Priorities to Progress

- As required FAD data begin to be reported and analyzed by the Scientific Committee, evaluate existing FAD management measures and, as appropriate, further develop and implement science-based limits on FAD deployments and/or FAD sets, consistent with management objectives for tropical tunas
- Ensure mechanisms to comply with the fully non-entangling without netting FAD provisions of Resolution 23/02 and require fleets to remove entangling FADs found in the water

FAD Management Information & Resources

BYCATCH MITIGATION & SHARK PROTECTIONS

2023 Ask

- Amend Res. 17/05 to require shark fins to be naturally attached for all landings

Background

Some shark and sea turtle species are declining in abundance. Current IOTC sea turtle and seabird conservation resolutions are outdated and do not include best-practice mitigation techniques.

Priorities to Progress

- Adopt measures to limit fishing mortality on sharks, based on IOTC Scientific Committee recommendations
- Amend Res. 12/04, Res. 12/06 and Res.13/04 to include scientifically proven mitigation measures and devices recommended by the IOTC SC for sea turtles, seabirds and cetaceans, such as hook-shielding devices for seabirds, and require identification of sea turtles at species level
- Adopt best practices for shark release, including use of safe release devices, as in WCPFC and IATTC

Bycatch Reduction Information & Resources

ELECTRONIC MONITORING AND REPORTING & OBSERVER COVERAGE

2023 Ask

- Adopt electronic monitoring (EM) terms and definitions, EM Program Standards and EM Data Standards as recommended by the Scientific Committee

Background

IOTC lags far behind other RFMO observer coverage rates. IOTC only requires 5% observer coverage regardless of gear and/or area of operation. Comprehensive and higher levels of observer coverage are critical to effective fisheries management; compliance monitoring; and independent verification of catch, effort, and non-target species interactions.

Priorities to Progress

- Adopt binding measure to ensure safety of human observers, including on supply and carrier vessels
- Require 100% observer coverage (human and/or electronic) in industrial tuna fisheries, including supply vessels and all those engaged in at sea transshipment

Electronic Monitoring and Reporting Information & Resources

EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES (HARVEST STRATEGIES)

Background

IOTC adopted a management procedure for bigeye and a HCR for skipjack, but progress is slow on management procedures for other species, especially yellowfin.

Priorities to Progress

- Develop comprehensive, precautionary management procedures and permanent Limit and Target Reference Points for tuna, especially yellowfin and skipjack
- Conduct management strategy evaluation (MSE) for albacore, skipjack, and yellowfin

TRANSSHIPMENT

Background

At-sea transshipments in the Indian Ocean have more than doubled since 2015. To better manage transshipment and combat IUU fishing activities, deficiencies and loopholes must be addressed in IOTC's regulation of this activity.

Priorities to Progress

Amend IOTC at-sea transshipment Resolution 22/02 to:

- Require authorized carrier vessels to be flagged to IOTC CPCs or cooperating non-contracting parties
- Require all reporting to be electronic and in near real-time, but no greater than 24 hours after event, and that all transshipment declarations be submitted to flag State and IOTC Secretariat
- Require all vessels authorized to conduct at-sea transshipment to have IMO number and operational automatic identification systems (AIS), and that VMS position data are provided to IOTC Secretariat in near-real time

VESSEL MONITORING SYSTEMS & PORT STATE MEASURES

Background

IOTC's VMS program is not centralized, and CPC compliance with existing requirements is low. Since the IOTC Resolution on Port State Measures is not fully aligned with FAO Agreement on Port State Measures, its effectiveness is undermined.

Priorities to Progress

- Adopt amendments to Res. 15/03 to strengthen the IOTC VMS, including by requiring that simultaneous near real-time position reporting and ensuring systems are tamper-proof
- Adopt amendments to Res. 16/11 to prioritize vessels for inspection in port, and include ports of CPCs outside IOTC Convention Area

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