

BLUE MARINE FOUNDATION – STATEMENT IN ADVANCE OF THE 27TH SESSION OF THE IOTC

The 27th Session of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) is an important opportunity to improve the management of the region's chronically overfished tropical tuna stocks.

Yellowfin tuna has been continuously overexploited in the Indian Ocean since 2015, and a 30% reduction in catches (relative to 2020 levels) is now needed to bring about stock recovery by 2030. Sadly, in addition to the perilous state of yellowfin tuna, the region's bigeye tuna stock is also overfished, with a 15% catch reduction from the 2021 catch level now necessary.

While skipjack is not yet overfished, the catch limit put in place for this stock has been entirely ignored by IOTC members for four years in a row. In 2018, the catch limit of 470,029 tonnes was exceeded by a staggering 30%. Most recently in 2021, more than 650,000 tonnes of skipjack were caught, exceeding the 513,572 tonne catch limit by over 100,000 tonnes. Witnessing the IOTC adopt the same approach to skipjack tuna that has already led to the dramatic decline in both yellowfin and bigeye tuna is extremely disappointing.

Earlier this year, a Special Session of the IOTC was held in Mombasa, Kenya, to discuss the management of fish aggregating devices (FADs) used by industrial tuna purse seine vessels to attract tuna. Fishing on drifting FADs is associated with high levels of bycatch of endangered, threatened and protected species – [a recent study](#) estimated that at least 100,000 silky sharks, which are listed as “vulnerable” on the IUCN Red List, end up as bycatch in the Indian Ocean purse seine industry each year – as well as entanglement, ghost fishing, marine pollution, and damage to sensitive ecosystems when they are lost or abandoned.

However, perhaps the most damaging impact of drifting FADs is the number of juvenile tunas that they attract. It was recently calculated that [97% of the yellowfin tuna](#) caught around drifting FADs by purse seine vessels in the Indian Ocean are juveniles. To help reduce the impact that drifting FADs have on these overexploited stocks, a new and [much celebrated](#) conservation and management measure (CMM) – [Resolution 23/02](#) – was adopted at the IOTC Special Session in February.

Resolution 23/02 will come into effect on 1 January 2024 and includes a 72-day drifting FAD closure as well as a phased reduction in the number of drifting FADs permitted per vessel. It was put forward by Indonesia and 10 other Indian Ocean coastal states and was adopted by a two-thirds majority following a vote by secret ballot in the final hours of the meeting, in line with the IOTC rules of procedure.

Against the wishes of this two-thirds majority, the EU and several other purse seine fishing countries have chosen to [object](#) to the new CMM put in place to save the Indian Ocean's tuna stocks from further decline, thereby undermining the effectiveness of the resolution and the IOTC as a whole.



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This irresponsible and indefensible decision by the EU is just the latest example of a highly concerning trend developing within the IOTC, whereby IOTC members lodge objections with increasing frequency to any CMMs that they would prefer not to implement, often with very little explanation or reason.

With this context in mind, Blue Marine Foundation calls on IOTC members to achieve the following as a matter of urgency:

- to adopt an equitable conservation and management measure that includes **a minimum 30% reduction in yellowfin tuna catches** relative to 2020 levels and ensure these reductions are achieved;
- to adopt an equitable conservation and management measure that includes **a minimum 15% reduction in bigeye tuna catches** relative to 2021 levels and ensure these reductions are achieved;
- to **implement Resolution 23/02 on drifting FADs as adopted**, and for those countries that have objected to the Resolution to withdraw their objections.