



FACTSHEET

SOUTH WEST INDIAN OCEAN REGIONAL
PROGRAMME • MAY 2023

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dFADs: FISHER'S FRIEND OR FOE?

Drifting fish aggregating devices, or dFADs, are floating structures used to attract fish in the open ocean so that they can then be caught en masse. Used in conjunction with purse seine nets, these devices have revolutionized commercial fishing by allowing fleets to harvest more tuna in much less time, saving money while improving yield.

However, this innovation has come at a cost. Because dFADs are not selective, a vast number of juvenile fish are caught before they can spawn. The result: except for a brief period around 2010 when piracy drove industrial fishing vessels away, tuna populations in the Indian Ocean have been in a steady decline since dFADs were first introduced in the mid-1980s.

In 2015, the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) declared Indian Ocean yellowfin tuna overfished. Yet until February 2023, when the IOTC adopted Resolution 23/02, this declaration had not been matched by effective measures to curb overfishing.

Today, Resolution 23/02 hangs in the balance. In line with the IOTC process that allows members to lodge objections to any resolution within 120 days of it being passed, seven members have lodged objections to the resolution.

WWF regards the reasons for these objections as spurious and driven by convenience. We, together with our market partners, urge IOTC member states to follow the available evidence and put in place measures to curb the use of dFADs to give yellowfin and other juvenile tunas the opportunity to spawn and so start rebuilding tuna stocks.

A JOINT PLEA

In March 2023, WWF, the Global Tuna Alliance and the Tuna Protection Alliance published a joint statement with several key players in the global tuna market urging members of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission to work collaboratively and make compromises for the long-term sustainability of tuna stocks in the region.

Broadly speaking, the statement reiterated the urgent call for the IOTC to:

- Agree a 30% reduction in catch relative to 2020 levels to stop yellowfin overfishing
- Agree a resolution that specifies how the yellowfin stock could be rebuilt in two generations (10 years). (The dFAD measures captured in Resolution 23/02 is one way to support this goal.)
- Revise the IOTC Treaty to prevent the spurious use of objections.

This statement was co-issued by the following companies: Auchan Retail, Blueyou Group, Bolton Food, Colruyt Group, E.Leclerc, Enseigne Coopérative, Ensis Fisheries, Groupe Casino, Groupement Les Mousquetaires, Horizon Fisheries, LDH Ltd, Lidl France, Moalia Sashimi Tuna, Norpac Fisheries Export, Princes Group, and World Wise Foods.



TUPA
Tuna Protection Alliance

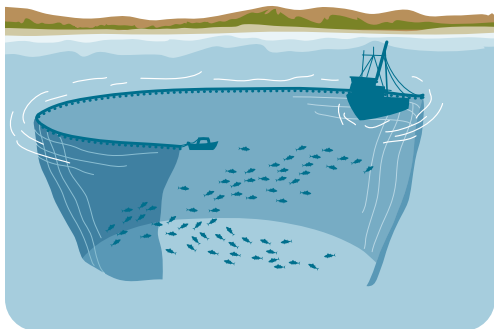


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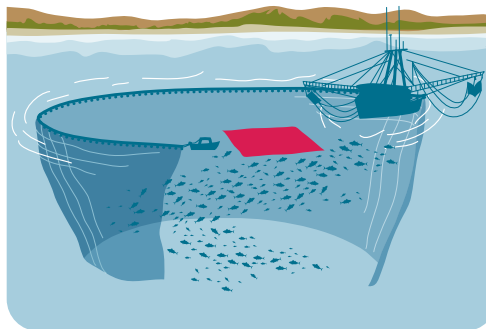
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1 Drifting fish aggregating devices (dFADs), when used with purse seine nets and other fishing gear, are brutally effective—and highly unselective—at harvesting sea life.



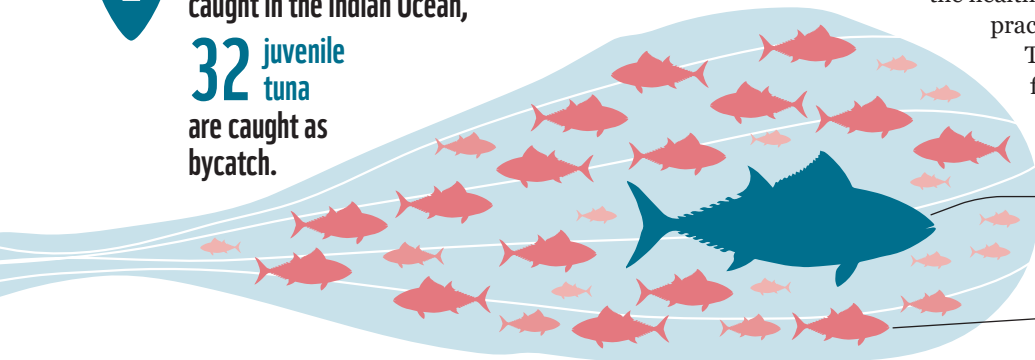
Purse seine nets without dFADs:
Catch limited to naturally occurring, free-swimming schools of tuna.



Purse seine nets with dFADs: Tuna are attracted to the device, dramatically increasing the number of fish—and juveniles in particular—per haul. This is true for other methods of fishing such as pole and line too.

2 For every adult yellowfin tuna caught in the Indian Ocean, **32** juvenile tuna are caught as bycatch.

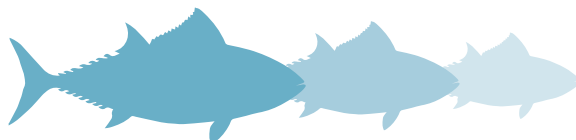
WWF uses yellowfin tuna as an indicator species to assess the health of ocean ecosystems, the impacts of fishing practices and the status of fisheries governance. The status of the stock therefore highlights a failure to effectively manage fisheries across the region more broadly.



Adult yellowfin tuna
Age: 6–7 years
Length: 1.8m
Able to spawn

Immature yellowfin tuna
Age: 1 year
Length: 60cm
Has not yet had a chance to spawn

3 The persistent harvesting of juvenile yellowfin tuna in the Indian Ocean since the mid-1980s—with a slight lull around 2010, when the region was overrun by pirates—has driven this economically important species to the **brink of collapse.**

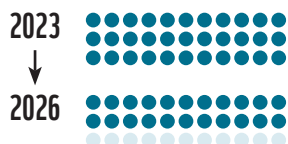


4 Governments have a responsibility to collaborate across borders to ensure the sustainable management of this commercially important fish species for the future benefit of all interested nations.

WWF, together with other members of the Indian Ocean Tuna Committee's Scientific Committee, urges member states to follow the scientific evidence and uphold Resolution 23/02, which seeks to, among other measures:

Reduce the number of dFADs used in the Indian Ocean from 300 currently to 200 by 1 January 2026.

As a precautionary measure, adopt a 72-day dFAD ban until the Scientific Committee provides advice on a dFAD closure.



For more information

Umair Shahid
Senior Indian Ocean Tuna Manager
WWF South West Indian Ocean
Seascope Regional Programme
ushahid@wwf.org.pk



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WWF, 28 rue Mauverney, 1196 Gland, Switzerland. Tel. +41 22 364 9111

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