



# FACTSHEET

SOUTH WEST INDIAN OCEAN REGIONAL  
PROGRAMME • MAY 2023

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## YELLOWFIN TUNA: A SPECIES NEARING FREEFALL

The Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) declared yellowtail tuna overfished in the region in 2015. Since then, efforts by the commission to implement catch limits and rebuild yellowfin tuna stocks have proven ineffective.

This is partly due to the IOTC's rules of engagement. All IOTC members are given the option to object to resolutions they disagree with, even when these are based on the best available data. This mechanism is important for ensuring a spirit of cross-border collaboration and fairness, but in practice it results in political will being privileged over scientific evidence.

In recent years, IOTC members have more than once used objections to spuriously opt out of resolutions based on IOTC Scientific Committee recommendations. One such resolution is Resolution 21/01, which entered into force in December 2021 despite objections from six members. This resolution specifies the total allowable catch for members that the objecting countries—India, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Madagascar, Oman and Somalia—have effectively opted out of.

Such manoeuvring has contributed to the yellowfin tuna population nearing collapse. Projections by the IOTC Scientific Committee place this collapse at 2027, assuming catch levels remain stable at 2017 rates. After this point, drastic measures will be required to rebuild stocks and success will not be guaranteed. The repercussions for livelihoods and food security will be severe.

Since the Scientific Committee projection was released, annual catch rates increased for two years (2018 and 2019) before starting to decline slightly. By 2021, the average annual catch was only 1.8% (7 695 tons) lower than the 2017 baseline year and 19% higher than the maximum sustainable yield. **Given the current status, WWF urges all IOTC members to:**

- Commit to be compliant with IOTC resolutions to limit opportunities for baseless objections and increase accountability.
- Adopt a plan to rebuild Indian Ocean yellowfin tuna that spans at least three years and targets a 30% reduction against 2020 levels to end overfishing by 2030.

## A NEAR-DECADE OF YELLOWFIN IN DECLINE

**2014:** Scientists raise alarm about yellowfin tuna being overfished.

**2015:** IOTC adopts provisional rules to manage key tuna and tuna-like species.

**2016:** First interim rebuilding plan adopted (Resolution 16/01). Yellowfin catch exceeds maximum sustainable yield by 6 282 tons (t).

**2017:** Second interim rebuilding plan adopted (Resolution 17/01). Yellowfin catch exceeds maximum sustainable yield by 1 695 t.

**2018:** Third interim rebuilding plan adopted (Resolution 18/01). Yellowfin catch exceeds maximum sustainable yield by 40 943 t.

**2019:** Fourth interim rebuilding plan adopted (Resolution 19/01). Largest yellowfin tuna catch recorded since 2010. Yellowfin catch exceeds maximum sustainable yield by 47 434 t.

**2021:** Resolution 21/01 adopted, specifying total allowable catch for each IOTC member.

**2022:** Maximum sustainable yield reduced to 349 000 t. Six IOTC members have lodged objections to Resolution 21/01, effectively opting out of catch limits.



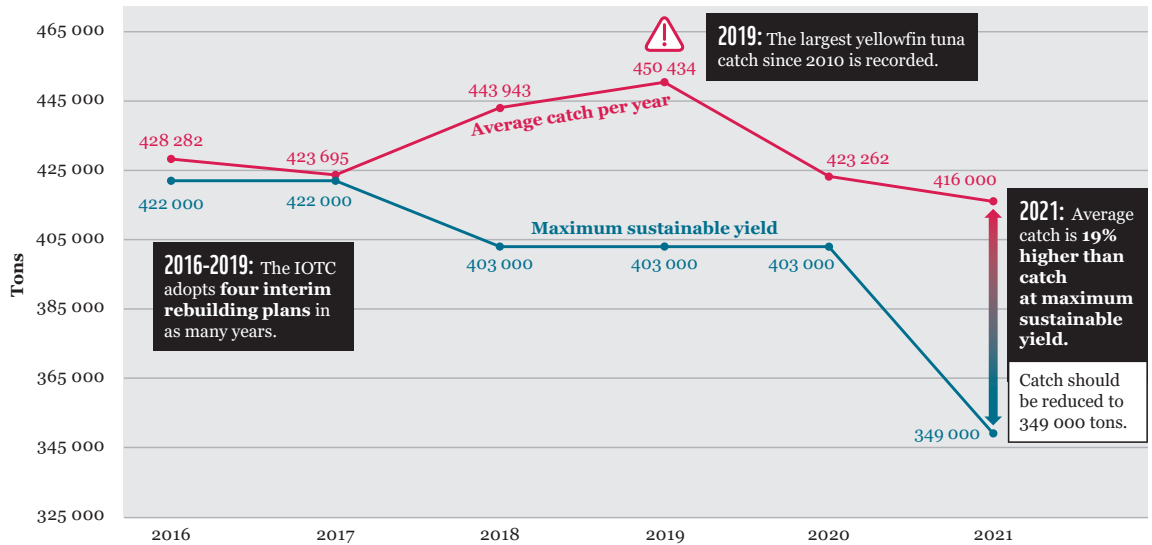
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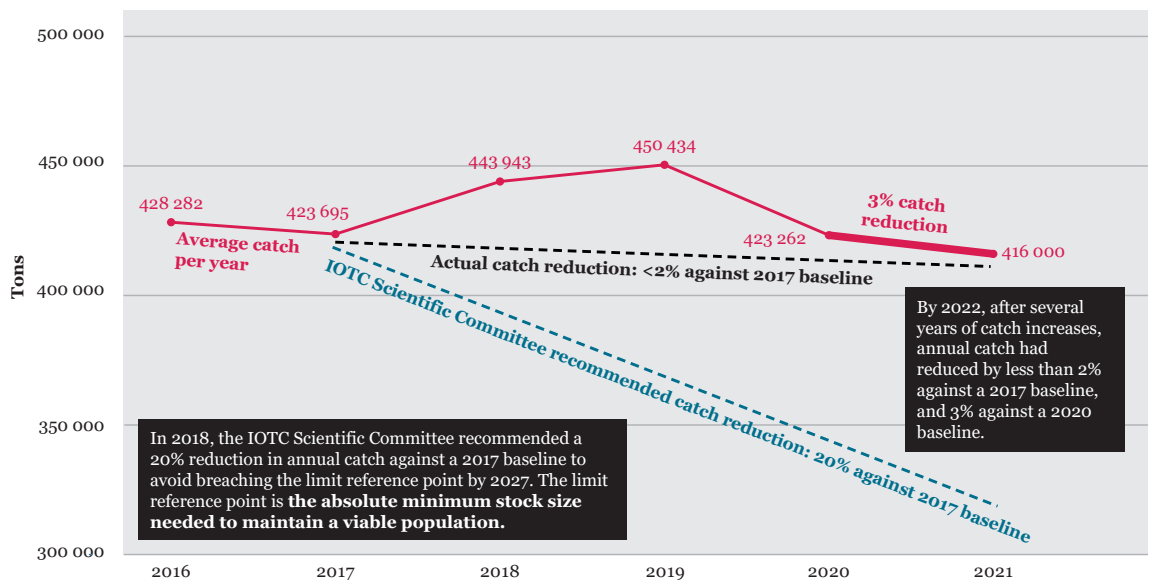
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The IOTC has to date been ineffective at reducing the annual catch to meet the maximum sustainable yield, which is the highest possible annual catch that can be sustained over time.



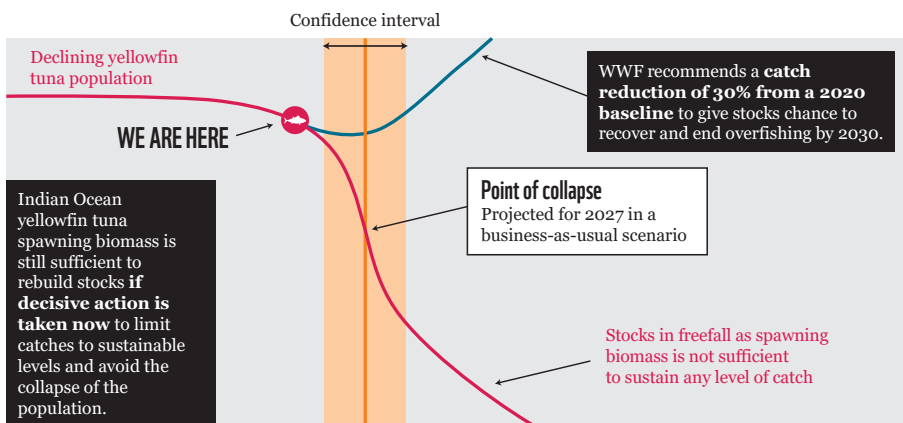
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In 2022, IOTC Scientific Committee projections found that a 30% catch reduction would give yellowfin stocks a 67% chance of recovering by 2030.



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We are nearing a crisis for yellowfin tuna recovery. The decisions we take today matter.



## For more information

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