
OUTCOMES OF THE 6th SPECIAL SESSION AND 27th SESSION OF THE COMMISSION

PREPARED BY: IOTC SECRETARIAT, 25 OCTOBER 2023

PURPOSE

To inform the Scientific Committee (SC) of the decisions and requests made by the Commission at its 6th Special Session and 27th Session, held from 3-5 February and 8-12 May 2023 respectively, specifically relating to the IOTC science process.

BACKGROUND

At the 6th Special Session of the Commission 2 Conservation and Management Measures were adopted (consisting of 2 Resolutions and 0 Recommendations), while at the 27th Session of the Commission, 9 Conservation and Management Measures were adopted (consisting of 8 Resolutions and 1 Recommendations), as detailed below

Resolutions

SS6

- Resolution 23/01 *On management of Anchored Fish Aggregating Devices (AFADs)* [[Download here](#)].
- Resolution 23/02 *On Management of Drifting Fish Aggregating Devices (DFADs) in the IOTC area of competence* [[Download here](#)] **NOTE – This Resolution did not enter into force.**

S27

- Resolution 23/3 *On Establishing a Voluntary Fishing Closure in the Indian Ocean for the Conservation of Tropical Tunas* [[Download here](#)]
- Resolution 23/4 *On Establishing Catch Limits for Bigeye Tuna in the Area of IOTC Competence* [[Download here](#)]
- Resolution 23/5 *On Establishing a Programme for Transshipment by Large-scale Fishing Vessels* [[Download here](#)]
- Resolution 23/6 *On the Conservation of Cetaceans* [[Download here](#)]
- Resolution 23/7 *On Reducing the Incidental Bycatch of Seabirds in Longline Fisheries* [[Download here](#)]
- Resolution 23/8 *On Electronic Monitoring Standards for IOTC Fisheries* [[Download here](#)]
- Resolution 23/9 *On a Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) Working Group* [[Download here](#)]
- Resolution 23/10 *Terms of Reference for a Working Party on Socio-Economics* [[Download here](#)]

Recommendations

- Recommendation 23/11 *To Enhance Cooperation in the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission Decision Making Process* [[Download here](#)].

The updated *Compendium of Active Conservation and Management Measures for the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission* may be downloaded from the IOTC website at the following links:

English: <http://iotc.org/cmms>

French: <http://iotc.org/fr/mcgs>

Below is a summary of the scientific requirements stipulated in the CMMs adopted at the 6th Special Session and 27th Session of the Commission:

Resolution 23/01 *On management of Anchored Fish Aggregating Devices (AFADs)*. This Resolution calls CPCs to develop AFAD management plans which are to be submitted to the Secretariat in 2024. It also requires that these management plans be reviewed against the Guidelines in Annex I of the Resolution, by the Compliance Committee and by the Scientific Committee each in their respective role with the objective to provide advice to CPCs on areas of improvement. It specifically notes that the AFAD location data provided by the CPCs as required by paragraph 8 of this Resolution shall only be used for the purposes of the Scientific Committee and relevant Working Parties and should not be publicly shared or circulated for any other purpose. The Resolution requires that the IOTC Executive Secretary in consultation with the Scientific Committee shall develop a best practice guideline for construction of AFADs and submit it to the Commission for adoption no later than the 29th Annual Session of the IOTC. The Scientific Committee shall also analyse further information, when available, and provide advice on existing, additional or alternative AFAD management options for sustainable fisheries. The Scientific Committee is also required, no later than at its annual session in 2025, provide a set of relevant indicators that would allow monitoring the effects of AFAD fisheries and assessing the efficiency of existing/additional/alternative AFAD management options. Lastly, the Scientific Committee shall provide scientific advice by assessing the impact of fishing using AFADs on juvenile tuna mortality and provide advice to the Commission.

Resolution 23/03 *On Establishing a Voluntary Fishing Closure in the Indian Ocean for the Conservation of Tropical Tunas*. This Resolution requires that the Scientific Committee provide advice and recommendations no later than 31st December 2023 on appropriate fishing closures applicable to all fishing gears. These recommendations need to consider the area, closure period and any other details, with the objective of achieving a high probability of reducing fishing mortality of juvenile tropical tuna, in particular bigeye and yellowfin tuna. If the Scientific Committee concludes that it does not currently possess access to sufficient scientific data to provide recommendations to the Commission, the SC shall provide recommendations relating to the data necessary for science-based recommendations for the information of the Commission. In producing its advice and recommendations, the IOTC Scientific Committee shall take into account, inter alia: a) available IOTC fisheries data; b) fishing behaviours/ patterns in the Indian Ocean, both historically and those anticipated as a consequence of the implementation of the closure or any new management measures.

Resolution 23/4 *On Establishing Catch Limits for Bigeye Tuna in the Area of IOTC Competence*. This Resolution requires the Scientific Committee to conduct a comparative analysis of the contribution of all fishing gears to the mortality of bigeye tuna, which shall include both absolute and relative contributions to mortality and stock depletion. In addition, the IOTC Scientific Committee are required to develop a table as shown in Annex 2 of the Resolution that quantifies the expected impact on maximum sustainable yield (MSY) and SSB_{msy} for bigeye tuna resulting from replacing fishing mortality/catches of any major fishing gear/fishery (e.g., Longline, DFAD fisheries, AFAD fisheries, Purse seine on free school, other fisheries) for consideration by the Commission at its 2025 Session. The Scientific Committee shall also provide advice on FAD management options, including on, limits on FADs sets, that may be necessary to achieve a replacement of fishing mortality of FAD fisheries with free school fisheries. This analysis shall be conducted for DFADs and AFADs fleets separately.

Resolution 23/6 *On the Conservation of Cetaceans*. This Resolution requests that the Scientific Committee develop best practice guidelines for the safe release and handling of encircled cetaceans, taking into account those developed in other Regional Fisheries Management Organisations, including the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, and that these guidelines be submitted to the Commission meeting for endorsement by 2025 at the latest. It also requires that the Scientific Committee shall review information on the status of cetaceans in the IOTC area of competence and provide recommendation or advice to the Commission no later than 2025 to identify appropriate measures that Commission shall take to mitigate negative effects of the interactions with cetaceans by the IOTC fisheries.

Resolution 23/7 *On Reducing the Incidental Bycatch of Seabirds in Longline Fisheries*. This Resolution requires that the Scientific Committee continue to review and make recommendations to the Commission on advancements and best practice in seabird bycatch mitigation as they become available. This will include, by 2024 at the latest, developing advice to the Commission on best practice branch line weighting. In addition, CPCs who elect to use hook-shielding devices as a mitigation method are encouraged to share their experience with other CPCs, as appropriate, through the Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch.

Resolution 23/8 *On Electronic Monitoring Standards for IOTC Fisheries.* This Resolution notes that upon the advice of the Scientific Committee and Compliance Committee, the Commission will review the Regional Electronic Monitoring Program (REMP), the EM Program Standard (Annex 1) and the EM System and Data Standards (Annex 2) after a period of 1 year from REMP implementation. It also states that the Scientific Committee shall, no later than 2024, review the ROS minimum required data fields to a) identify any fields that are logistically difficult for EM and/or human observers to collect, respectively; and b) provide advice and recommendations to the Commission on the need and use of those identified fields for scientific purposes, and their collection and reporting status (i.e. mandatory, non-mandatory etc.). c) Discuss and provide advice to the Commission on the potential need to develop a separate EM ROS minimum data fields list. In addition, to support the implementation of the REMP and the work of the Scientific Committee referred to in paragraph 5 of the Resolution, CPCs are encouraged to share relevant information, approaches and experiences, including those involving capacity building needs and any CPC-level knowledge exchange, with the Scientific Committee and Compliance Committee

Resolution 23/9 *On a Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) Working Group.* This Resolution provides updated Terms of Reference for the previous Working Group on FADs and removes its ad hoc status.

Resolution 23/10 *Terms of Reference for a Working Party on Socio-Economics.* This Resolution defines the Terms of Reference for a new IOTC Working Party. Specifically, the Working Party on Socio-Economics (WPSE) shall inform the Commission on the socio-economic status and dynamics of fisheries for tuna and tuna-like species in the IOTC area of competence and to assess and advise on potential impacts to CPCs arising from the Conservation and Management Measures, allocation of quotas and catch limits, and recommendations of the IOTC Scientific Committee. The WPSE would be technical and scientific in nature and should be composed of stakeholders, experts and practitioners, in particular the following: a. social scientists; b. economists; c. fisheries officers; d. invited experts. The participation of the Chair of the Scientific Committee (or designee) in the WPSE shall be mandatory. The WPSE is required to work closely with the Working Party on Data Collection and Statistics to collect and compile information about past and present social and economic indicators including but not limited to social and economic contribution of fisheries for tuna and tuna-like species in the IOTC area of competence, respective economic dependence on fish stocks, the social and economic importance of the fishery, contribution to national food security needs, domestic consumption, income from exports, fisheries subsidies and employment.

DISCUSSION

Requests from the Commission

At the 27th Session of the Commission, Members made several comments regarding the recommendations made by the Scientific Committee, which participants are asked to **NOTE** (extracts from IOTC–2023–S27-R):

1. The Commission **NOTED** that all scientific working group and working party meetings had been successfully held in 2022, utilising videoconference platforms and a shortened format. The Commission also **NOTED** that the Scientific Committee meeting had been held in the Seychelles using a hybrid format and that the MPF was used to support the attendance of participants to that meeting (Para 16).
2. The Commission **NOTED** that 26 National Reports were submitted to the IOTC Secretariat in 2022 by CPCs and that this was an increase when compared with the 21 reports provided by CPCs in 2021 (Para 17).
3. The Commission **NOTED** the concern expressed by several members that the lack of basic data for some species has resulted in their stock status being assessed as uncertain. The Commission **URGED** all members to submit data to improve the assessments for species under the IOTC mandate (Para 18).
4. The Commission **NOTED** the request from several members to provide capacity building to improve participation in the IOTC stock assessment processes. Although this is particularly relevant for the discussions regarding Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) it is also an issue for the complex stock assessments currently being conducted by the SC (Para 19).
5. The Commission **NOTED** a request by a member to provide information on stock status on the high seas and separately for within EEZs. The SC Chair explained that the current understanding of the stock structure of most IOTC species does not allow for this kind of separation, as the stocks are commonly highly migratory and

cross these management boundaries. In addition, the data provided by most members is not sufficiently spatially stratified to be able to separate the catch between these regions accurately (Para 20).

The status of tropical and temperate tunas

6. The Commission **ENQUIRED** as to the status of the report from the recently conducted YFT stock assessment external peer review workshop that was held in February 2023. The SC Chair explained that the report was currently being finalised by the expert panel and would be presented to the WPTT in October. Feedback will be provided to the Commission once the SC has been able to review the expert panel’s recommendations. The SC Chair further clarified that the expert panel’s recommendations would be used to improve future YFT stock assessments as well as guide future planning for YFT work (Para 23).
7. The Commission **NOTED** that the SC was currently prioritising single species MSEs as there was a need to provide robust management advice on a species-by-species basis. However, the SC is also looking into the possibility of developing a multi-species MSE for tropical tunas, considering the nature of the tropical tuna fishery. In addition, the feasibility of incorporating environmental factors and climate change into the MSEs is being assessed (Para 24).

Scientific Committee Recommendations

8. The Commission **NOTED** the stock status summaries for species of tuna and tuna-like species under the IOTC mandate, as well as other species impacted by IOTC fisheries and considered the recommendations made by the Scientific Committee to the Commission. The Commission **ENDORSED** the Scientific Committee’s 2022 list of recommendations as its own (Para 31).
9. The Commission **NOTED** in particular, SC Recommendation 15 that Resolution 16/07 On the use of artificial lights to attract fish (which prohibits using artificial lights for the purpose of aggregating tuna and tuna-like species) does not apply to scientific studies (Para 32).
10. The Commission **ENDORSED** those officials elected for the SC and its subsidiary (scientific) bodies for the coming years, as listed in Appendix 7 of the 2022 Scientific Committee Report (Para 33).
11. On behalf of the Commission, the Chairperson thanked the outgoing Scientific Committee Chair, Professor Toshihide Kitakado (Japan) for his service to the Commission (Para 34).

Reports of the 6th Special Session and 27th Session of the IOTC

The reports of the 6th Special Session and 27th Session of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission are available on the IOTC website.

<http://www.iotc.org/>

RECOMMENDATION/S

That the Scientific Committee:

- 1) **NOTE** paper IOTC–2023–SC26–03 which outlined the main outcomes of the 6th Special Session and the 27th Session of the Commission, specifically related to the IOTC science process and **AGREE** to consider how best to provide the Commission with the information it has requested, throughout the course of the current SC meeting.
- 2) **NOTE** that 9 Conservation and Management Measures (CMMs) were adopted at both Sessions of the Commission.