

04 April 2024

IOTC CIRCULAR 2024-18

Dear Madam / Sir

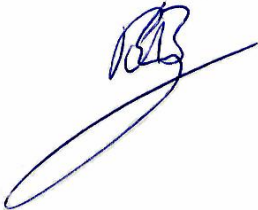
REQUEST FOR OBSERVER STATUS FROM THE GERMAN OCEAN FOUNDATION

Please find attached a request letter from the German Ocean Foundation to participate as an Observer to the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission processes.

In accordance with Rule XIV of the IOTC Rules of Procedure, Contracting Parties of the Commission may wish to allow German Ocean Foundation to participate as an Observer given their interest in the IOTC as stipulated in the attached letter. Thus, unless any objections are received within 30 days of the date of this Circular, the IOTC Secretariat will consider that approval has been granted for the Executive Secretary to issue an invitation to the potential Observer to attend IOTC meetings accordingly.

Please note that as this request came less than 60 days before the 2024 Session of the Commission (S28), should this application be successful, the German Ocean Foundation will only be invited to attend the 2025 Session (S29)

Yours sincerely



Paul de Bruyn
Executive Secretary

Attachments:

- Letter from the German Ocean Foundation

Distribution

IOTC Contracting Parties: Australia, Bangladesh, China, Comoros, European Union, France (Territories), India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Rep of), Japan, Kenya, Rep. of Korea, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Oman, Pakistan, Philippines, Seychelles, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sudan, United Rep. of Tanzania, Thailand, United Kingdom, Yemen. **Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties:** Liberia. **Intergovernmental Organisations, Non-Governmental Organisations.** **Chairperson IOTC.** **Copy to:** FAO Headquarters, FAO Representatives to CPCs.

This message has been transmitted by email only



German Ocean Foundation * Grimm 12 * 20457 Hamburg

Indian Ocean Tuna Commission
Le Chantier Mall
PO Box 1011
Victoria Mahé
Seychelles

Hamburg, 27.03.2024

Dear Secretariat of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission,

The German Ocean Foundation is an internationally active environmental NGO registered as a charity in Germany. The foundation has been founded in 2015 by Frank Schweikert and has currently 5 employees plus several scientific advisors and is further supported by more than 100 volunteers.

The foundation is dedicated to marine conservation focusing on public education, policy advocacy, and research activities as the main pillars for a transition to healthy marine ecosystems within Europe and globally. We are based in Germany and run research expeditions with our own research vessel, the Aldebaran, which also becomes home for dozens of young scientists and students when hosting our ocean award challenge every year. Furthermore, we bring together more than 100 ocean conservation NGOs every year for an interactive educational program as part of the annual BOOT exhibition in Düsseldorf providing a stage for scientists and NGOs to present their studies and allowing children to experience and learn about our oceans and the imminent urgency to protect marine ecosystems and the biodiversity they host.

However, the German Ocean Foundation is not only active in Germany and Europe but also acts internationally with a strong focus on the conservation of biodiversity and to reduce the impact of fisheries on the loss of biodiversity. As such we have supported the work of other NGOs, like Sharkproject, in their RFMO policy work for sharks in several campaigns, e.g. for a retention ban for shortfin mako in the North Atlantic by supporting this through our policy advocacy in Germany and the European Union.

As part of our ocean advocacy, we have been engaged and promoted sustainable fishing activities for more than a decade and as such have also engaged in several MSC assessments and the MSC's latest Fishery Standard Review as a member of Make Stewardship Count, an international coalition of more than 90 NGOs and

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scientists advocating for improvements in sustainable fishing with the main focus on reducing fisheries' impacts on bycatch and ecosystems (Principle 2 of the MSC FS).

Now, we are stepping up our international activities and intend to extend the research excursions on our vessel also into the southern hemisphere, working with small scale fisheries in the South Atlantic on sustainable fishing and elasmobranch bycatch reduction and hosting local educational programs in communities. Therefore, we will become more actively involved in tuna fisheries and would like to become an observer at IOTC committed to the conservation and management of Atlantic tuna stocks and several shark stocks.

Fishing provides an important source of protein for millions of people on our planet and seafood is essential for the livelihoods of many more people, especially in developing countries in the southern hemisphere, heavily depending on healthy oceans for subsistence and income. We are committed to the sustainable management of fish stocks and acknowledge the importance of management and conservation measures taken by RFMOs for reducing fishery impact on marine ecosystems and threatened marine species. Today the sustainable use of marine resources and long-term conservation of the biodiversity of marine ecosystems are challenging but essential tasks we must tackle and in which tuna RFMOs play an important role in.

Therefore, we consider becoming an observer at IOTC as a consequent next step for us, especially as IOTC has demonstrated leadership in shark management over the last couple of years when adopting a retention ban for shortfin mako in the North and an allocated TAC in the South following scientific advice and most recently has started to manage blue shark stocks in the Atlantic by developing harvest strategies for both stocks in the near future and already implementing allocated TAC for both stocks from this year onwards.

As top predators, sharks are essential for healthy ecosystems and the biodiversity in our oceans, but they are globally facing an increasing risk of extinction as a result of industrial fishing activities over the last 50 years. With three quarters of all oceanic shark species already being classified as threatened by IUCN and an increasing number of previously data deficient shark species being classified as threatened at the time data become available, this is certainly an important challenge for all RFMOs to address. Furthermore, sharks are no longer able to perform their role in the ecosystem when stocks are at the brink of collapse as already overfished and overfishing continuing in the absence of effective measures and knowledge of total fishing mortality as reporting of species-specific catch efforts and discards remains inappropriate for most sharks.

Therefore, robust fishery management procedures including harvest control rules, with target, limit, and threshold reference points should be developed for all commercially fished fish stocks including sharks. Furthermore, effective bycatch mitigation measures are needed to avoid catching and reduce mortality of unwanted

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species, including threatened shark species that must not be retained and are therefore discarded by the fisheries. We consider this being important missions for all tuna RFMOs which thereby also play an important role in global shark conservation.

Engaging in conservation efforts in the major tuna RFMOs is important to us and as a European based organisation IOTC is obviously the most important RFMO for us to engage in.

Therefore, we would very much appreciate being granted observer status at IOTC and kindly ask you to consider our application and to inform us as soon as this has been granted. We also plan to attend this year's Commission Meeting in person and will provide a letter of credentials once our observer status has been approved.

This is the first time we are applying for observer status at IOTC and we haven't been revoked observer status at any time. In case of any further questions please do reach out to me and let me know.

Kind regards,

Frank Schweikert

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