



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



iotc ctoi

**COMMON
OCEANS**
PROGRAM

APRIL 2024



Tuna project

Update on the Common Oceans Tuna Project

Common Oceans Tuna Project 2022-2027 The Project “Sustainable Management of Tuna Fisheries and Biodiversity Conservation in the Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction” is a continuation of an earlier project (2014-2019) with the same name (“ABNJ Tuna Project”). The Project objective is to achieve responsible, efficient, and sustainable tuna production and biodiversity conservation in the ABNJ in face of a changing environment. This is a GEF-funded project, implemented by FAO and executed by the IOTC through a Project Management Unit. Activities are carried out by the partners of the project and most of the contracts are in place and activities have started.

Activities with a focus in the Indian Ocean region

1. Conservation International, in collaboration with the Pacific Community (SPC), and Mercator Oceans International has started work to **model the effects of climate change on tuna distribution in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans.**

This work builds on previous modelling work carried out in the Pacific Ocean to study the effects of climate change on tuna fisheries which showed dramatic shifts eastward in the distribution of tuna stocks in the Pacific, hence predicting economic losses for Pacific Island countries. During the 2nd phase of the Tuna Project, Conservation International, the Pacific Community, and Mercator Oceans International will extend and replicate this work to the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, as well as in the Pacific, by using updated and improved physical-biogeochemical forcings data, modelling at finer resolution, and include various climate change scenarios (based on IPCC three emission levels). The model SEAPODYM will be used to simulate spatiotemporal dynamics of tuna populations under the influence of both fishing and environment, including their prey (zooplankton and micronekton). The goal is to project the future of the tuna population using (corrected) forcing fields from IPCC scenarios and provide this information on climate change impacts to decision-makers for appropriate action.

A **Steering Committee** comprising Conservation International, Pacific Community (SPC), Mercator Oceans International, the Tuna Project, and t-RFMO representation will be formed to meet annually to review progress and endorse or recommend revisions to the workplan. Engagement with ICCAT and IOTC is important, and the respective Chairs of the Scientific Committees (as well as Ecosystems and Bycatch) will be invited to participate. The first meeting is expected in 2024.

2. WWF Pakistan will carry out a **pilot trial conversion of 10 fishing vessels from gillnet to longline gear** in the Pakistani gillnet fleet.



global
environment
facility
INVESTING IN OUR PLANET



The Indian Ocean gillnet fishery is the largest gillnet fishery in the world, with between 34-40 percent of tuna catches in the region taken by gillnet, and the catch share of this gear type continuing to increase. These gillnet fisheries produce chronically high levels of bycatch, with sharks, turtles and cetaceans being the most affected. Moreover, gillnets are also widely recognized as the most problematic of all gear types in regard to cetacean bycatch specifically.

The goal is to show the commercial benefits from gear conversion, and this will be documented through a business case. Considering the measure (CMM) adopted by IOTC on prohibiting gillnets of more than 2.5 km in length, this initiative, if successful, will contribute to solving an important issue, as most of the Pakistani (and other fleets in the North Indian Ocean) gillnetters exceed this limit.

3. IOTC will carry out three additional surveys to estimate abandoned, lost, and discarded fishing gear in addition to the three already carried out under the first phase targeting identified priority fisheries.

The work on ALDFG is planned for a period of three years to contribute to the FAO Global ALDFG surveys with a focus on the Indian Ocean. This activity will address data gaps identified by the Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental Protection Working Group (GESAMP Working Group 43), providing estimations of the quantity and impact of ALDFG. Surveys have been carried out in Pakistan and the Seychelles under the first phase of the Tuna Project. In the second phase of the project, implementation of surveys will be through LoAs with institutions in three IOTC Member countries (e.g. China, India, Indonesia TBC), following the identification of priority countries/fisheries to be surveyed. Work in China has already started through Shanghai Ocean University.

4. The International Pole and Line Foundation (IPNLF) is working towards improving the socio-economic performance of one-by-one tuna fisheries.

During the first year, 15 fisheries across nine Indian Ocean coastal countries were assessed. IPNLF will work with fishing communities in Kawa (Indonesia), Pemba Island (Tanzania) and Maseirah Island (Oman) for different pilots including innovative technologies to support traceability, handline value improvements and a pilot study on the benefits from converting gillnet fishers to one-by-one tuna fishing techniques.

5. The International Whaling Commission (IWC) will assess cetacean bycatch and data gaps across the Indian Ocean, build regional capacity and awareness on cetacean bycatch and available solutions, and collaboratively develop recommendations (CMM) to address cetacean bycatch for consideration by the IOTC. A Cooperation Agreement was established with the IOTC.

6. Activities led by Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT) targeting IOTC CPCs who are also CCSBT members (Australia, European Union, Indonesia, Japan, Republic of Korea, South Africa) to enhance education, outreach, and capacity building for the monitoring and implementation of seabird bycatch mitigation measures, as well as an update of the 2016 global seabird risk assessment.



Other activities of relevance to the IOTC:

7. Three **joint tuna RFMO Working Groups** will be convened on topics of global relevance to be decided by the tuna RFMOs, where ICCAT will take the lead in organizing these events with support from FAO.

A small steering group was formed comprising the t-RFMO Secretariats and the Tuna Project, as well as the Pacific Community (SPC). The proposed themes for the three joint tuna RFMO working groups concern bycatch, MSE, and stock assessment, where the first is tentatively scheduled for the end of 2024.

8. ISSF in collaboration with FAO/IOTC will support the processes in t-RFMOs on the **implementation of Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM)**.

The emphasis is on how to operationalize EAFM in t-RFMOs and establish a way forward by producing recommendations. This will include updating and improving information materials, building on the outputs from workshops held in 2016 and 2019. Three workshops are planned to bring together stakeholders from the t-RFMOs, including delegates from CPCs, to discuss approaches and help develop EAFM action plans / roadmaps. The outputs from these workshops will be disseminated broadly and the goal is the adoption of EAFM roadmaps in t-RFMOs with the support from partners and CPCs that can champion the approach in t-RFMO Commission meetings. The first workshop is scheduled for 21-23 January 2025 in FAO, Rome.

9. ICCAT started work on simulation studies using **EcoTest (testing ecosystem-based indicators and management policies)** that establish a range of credible ecosystem hypotheses including fleet and bycatch behaviour in order to determine in which instances indicators and management policies might be considered reliable. The objective is to study how harvest rates will work under different assumptions of ecosystem and climate change conditions, taking into account the correlation of fishing mortality between target and secondary species. The open-source software package will be freely available.

10. The Ocean Foundation supports capacity building in **Harvest Strategies/Management Strategy Evaluation** in tuna RFMOs through technical support, developing e-learning courses and interactive tools, hosting quarterly webinars, and producing supporting outreach materials. More information can be found here [Harvest Strategies | 21st century fisheries management](#).

11. The International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF) continues efforts in bycatch mitigation such as: a) develop and promote **biodegradable/ non-entangling FADs**; b) hold **skippers' workshops** to adopt best practices; c) develop **acoustic technology**; and d) produce and disseminate a **policy paper for holistic bycatch management** that considers the impact of different fishing gears.

12. The Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) will develop a **Certificate IV Fisheries Enforcement and Compliance qualification program** for MCS officers with an initial focus on the Atlantic Ocean with the potential to expand to the Indian Ocean. This builds on the successful model used in the Western Pacific. FFA has been working closely with IMCS Network on identifying potential education institutions for accreditation purposes, as well as preliminary discussions with TM-Tracking and Nelson Mandela University (NMU). NMU would be an ideal choice through its FishForce Academy, providing the service of adopting the existing Pacific material to the ICCAT Convention Area and develop the learning materials using their team of experts.



COMMON OCEANS | Tuna Project

The Common Oceans Tuna project brings together a global partnership aiming to advance responsible tuna fisheries management and the conservation of biodiversity in the ocean areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ). Funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and led by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), it works in collaboration with the five regional tuna fisheries management organizations, intergovernmental organizations, national governments, civil society, and the private sector.

For more information: <https://www.fao.org/in-action/commonoceans/en/>