



Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) Annual Meeting, May 13-17, 2024

ISSF underscores the importance of cooperation and consultation among all RFMO members — a tenet that is enshrined in the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement and essential to managing highly migratory fish stocks like tunas. We encourage all IOTC Parties to give effect to their duty to cooperate to achieve the objectives of the IOTC Convention and effective management through the adoption of science-based conservation measures that all Parties support and implement fully.

This Position Statement outlines issues that we urge the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) to act on at its upcoming meeting.



COMPLIANCE PROCESSES

2024 Asks

In implementing its revised compliance assessment process the Compliance Committee:

- Must address CPC non-compliance with the provision of mandatory fishery and FAD data, catch and FAD limits and use of gillnets
- Require CPCs to submit action plans that address identified non-compliance

Background

A strong compliance process improves fisheries management by ensuring robust and transparent assessment of RFMO member accountability. IOTC Compliance Committee reports show significant CPC non-compliance with IOTC measures, which reduces their effectiveness. ISSF and Pew Charitable Trusts have recommendations to improve RFMO compliance processes in workshop reports: [2020 report](#), [2021 report](#), [2022 report](#).

Priorities to Progress

- Develop a scheme for responses to CPC non-compliance.

[RFMO Compliance Information & Resources](#)



2024 Asks

- Adopt amendments to Res. 21/01, including further management measures, such as seasonal fishery closures for all gear types, to give full effect to IOTC Scientific Committee advice to reduce yellowfin tuna catches by at least 22% (relative to the 2020 level), and ensure all CPCs abide by the Resolution.
- Prevent skipjack catches from exceeding the limit set by Harvest Control Rule (HCR) in Res. 21/03
- Ensure bigeye catches do not exceed limit set by Management Procedure in Res. 22/03 and 23/04

Background

Since 2014-2015, the Indian Ocean tropical tuna total catch has increased around 30%, despite IOTC's yellowfin rebuilding plan (2016), and skipjack HCR annual quota (2018) — highlighting the ineffectiveness of catch limits and management measures. Yellowfin is overfished, subject to overfishing, and — without agreement on science-based, enforceable actions — likely to experience further declines. IOTC's Scientific Committee (SC) advised in 2021 yellowfin would recover to SSB_{MSY} by 2030 with (1) 50% probability if catches decreased by at least 22% (from 2020 levels) or (2) 67% probability with a 30% reduction.

Skipjack catches in 2018-2022 exceeded the HCR limit (by around 30% in 2021 and 2022), reaching a record-high 666,380 tons in 2022 — a 20% increase from 2020.

Bigeye is overfished and subject to overfishing. Res. 22/03 on bigeye Management Procedure recommended a TAC of 80,583 tons per year for 2024-2025, which requires a 21% catch reduction from the 2022 catch level.

Priorities to Progress

- Cooperate in order to adopt allocated catch limits and effective management measures to reduce overall catch and fishing mortality for the three tropical tunas
- Consolidate the existing disparate tropical tuna management measures into one, new comprehensive Tropical Tuna Management measure.
- Ensure CPCs comply with prohibition on large-scale driftnets on high seas and accelerate implementation of Res. 17/07

[Tuna Conservation Information & Resources](#)



2024 Asks

In line with ISSF's established approach to strengthening FAD management:

- Develop and implement science-based limits on FAD deployments and/or FAD sets, consistent with management objectives for tropical tunas and commensurate with other tropical tuna management measures
- Adopt the definition of "biodegradable" categories consistent with those of IATTC and WCPFC and establish a timeline for transition to biodegradable FADs similar to what was agreed in the IATTC in 2023
- Develop and adopt FAD marking guidelines, including requiring marking of buoy and FAD structure
- Develop an IOTC-wide FAD register for FAD monitoring
- Require vessels to report complete FAD position data and acoustic biomass records from echosounder buoys for scientific use with appropriate time-lags to protect confidentiality
- Develop and adopt FAD tracking and recovery policies, as called for in Res.19/02, that consider utilizing supply vessels in FAD recovery efforts
- Adopt clearer rules for FAD ownership and activation, and for FAD buoy deactivation

Background

In 2018-2022, FAD sets accounted for nearly 35% of tropical tuna catches (37% of skipjack, 22% of yellowfin, and 43% of bigeye) in the Indian Ocean. Comprehensive FAD management will help to manage fishing pressure, reduce the catch on the three tropical tuna stocks, and lower other ecosystem impacts.

Priorities to Progress

- Ensure mechanisms to comply with the fully non-entangling without netting FAD provisions of Resolution 19/02 and require fleets, where practicable, to remove entangling FADs found in the water.

[FAD Management Information & Resources](#)



BYCATCH MITIGATION & SHARK PROTECTIONS

2024 Asks

- Amend Res. 17/05 to require shark fins to be naturally attached for all landings
- Amend Res. 12/04 and Res.23/06 to include scientifically proven mitigation measures and devices recommended by the IOTC SC for sea turtles and cetaceans, and require identification of sea turtles at species level

Background

Some shark and sea turtle species are declining in abundance. The requirement of fins naturally attached in Res. 17/05 only applies to vessels landing fresh sharks. Current IOTC sea turtle conservation resolutions are outdated and do not include best-practice mitigation techniques.

Priorities to Progress

- Adopt measures to limit fishing mortality on sharks, based on IOTC Scientific Committee recommendations
- Adopt best practices for shark release, including use of safe release devices, as in WCPFC and IATTC

[Bycatch Reduction Information & Resources](#)



ELECTRONIC MONITORING AND REPORTING & OBSERVER COVERAGE

2024 Asks

- Adopt measures to begin increasing observer coverage (human and/or electronic) from 5% as progress toward 100% coverage in industrial tuna fisheries, including all vessels engaged in at sea transshipment
- Adopt a binding measure that will ensure the safety of human observers, including those on supply and carrier vessels

Background

IOTC lags far behind other RFMO observer coverage rates. IOTC only requires 5% observer coverage regardless of gear and/or area of operation. Comprehensive and higher levels of observer coverage are critical to effective fisheries management; compliance monitoring; and independent verification of catch, effort, and non-target species interactions.

Priorities to Progress

- Require 100% observer coverage (human and/or electronic) in industrial tuna fisheries, including supply vessels and all those engaged in at sea transshipment

[Electronic Monitoring and Reporting Information & Resources](#)



EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES (HARVEST STRATEGIES)

2024 Asks

- Adopt a comprehensive Management Procedure for skipjack
- Accelerate the adoption of robust management procedures for yellowfin tuna

Background

IOTC adopted a management procedure for bigeye and only adopted a HCR for skipjack, but progress is slow on management procedures for other species, especially yellowfin.

Priorities to Progress

- Develop permanent Limit and Target Reference Points for all tunas
- Conduct management strategy evaluation (MSE) for albacore



VESSEL MONITORING SYSTEMS & PORT STATE MEASURES

2024 Asks

- In order to improve compliance with tuna conservation measures, such as seasonal closures for all gear types, adopt amendments to Res. 15/03 to strengthen the IOTC VMS, including by requiring that simultaneous near real-time position reporting and ensuring systems are tamper-proof

Background

IOTC's VMS program is not centralized, and CPC compliance with existing requirements is low. Since the IOTC Resolution on Port State Measures is not fully aligned with FAO Agreement on Port State Measures, its effectiveness is undermined.

Priorities to Progress

- Adopt amendments to Res. 16/11 to prioritize vessels for inspection in port, and include ports of CPCs outside IOTC Convention Area.



TRANSSHIPMENT REGULATION

Background

At-sea transshipments in the Indian Ocean have more than doubled since 2015. To better manage transshipment and combat IUU fishing activities, deficiencies and loopholes must be addressed in IOTC's regulation of this activity.

Priorities to Progress

Amend IOTC at-sea transshipment Resolution 23/05 to:

- Require authorized carrier vessels to be flagged to IOTC CPCs or cooperating non-contracting parties
- Require all reporting to be electronic and in near real-time, but no greater than 24 hours after event, and that all transshipment declarations be submitted to flag State and IOTC Secretariat
- Require all vessels authorized to conduct at-sea transshipment to have IMO number and operational automatic identification systems (AIS), and that VMS position data are provided to IOTC Secretariat in near-real time

[Transshipment Regulation Information & Resources](#)



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