

The European Union needs to assume leadership on banning drifting FADs, to allow the IOTC to make progress on other, more complex issues

BLOOM's position statement — 28^{th} Session of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission

Paris, 10 May 2024

Over recent years, IOTC negotiations have stalled on several polarized issues such as quota allocation, and most notably on the proliferation of drifting FADs and their negative impacts on marine biodiversity:

- **Juvenile catch**: the proportion of juvenile tuna is tremendous within purse seiners' FAD-associated catch vs. free-swimming schools catch: 99.7% vs. 61.4% for bigeye tuna (overfished), 95.9% vs. 32.1% for yellowfin tuna (overfished), and 33.9% vs. 16.7% for skipjack tuna (see 'Additional details' at the end of this document);
- **Bycatch of sensitive species**: the bycatch rate of FAD-associated operations is also higher than for freeswimming schools, in particular regarding vulnerable species such as the silky shark, or even critically endangered species such as the oceanic whitetip shark or sea turtles,¹ where the mortality of a few individuals can have dramatic consequences for the entire population;
- Pollution: according to the IOTC Secretariat, there are currently around 13,000 drifting FADs operating in the Indian Ocean annually.² It is estimated that at least 40% of the drifting FADs deployed in the Indian Ocean are abandoned or lost at sea.³ For the French 'CFTO' company, for instance, data shows that while some 2,750 FADs were deployed in 2021, only 34 were recovered at sea.⁴ Given that these FADs are equipped with electronic beacons to track their drift and estimate the quantity of fish available under them, the loss and beaching of these beacons induces considerable electronic pollution (batteries, solar panels, electronic circuits, etc.), with impacts that are still largely unknown but undoubtedly negative;
- Beaching and degradation of sensitive habitats: Satellite tracking of FADs shows that around 10% end up stranded on beaches or coral reefs, mainly in the Maldives and Seychelles, representing between 1,500 and 2,000 devices each year.⁵ Damage to coral reefs is becoming increasingly frequent and well-documented, as in the Mayotte Marine Natural Park, where the stranding of a FAD recently damaged 200 m² of coral reef,⁶ or in Aldabra Atoll, a UNESCO World Heritage site, where fishing nets and FADs are the main types of waste found stranded around the island.⁷

Since the inception of the IOTC at the end of the 1990s, the proliferation of drifting FADs and these negative impacts have regularly and pressingly been raised,⁸ but are yet to be resolved. For instance, following Resolution 99/01,⁹ which aimed to work towards adopting time and area closures on the use of FADs, Australia even tabled a resolution for a three-month seasonal closure for the conservation of bigeye and yellowfin tuna as early as 2002.¹⁰

¹ See the IUCN 'red list' of endangered species, <u>for example for sharks</u>.

² IOTC (2023) A recent overview of the large-scale purse seine fishery operating in the Indian Ocean with drifting fish aggregating devices.

³ Imzilen *et al.* (2022) <u>Recovery at sea of abandoned, lost or discarded drifting fish aggregating devices</u>.

⁴ MSC (2023) <u>CFTO Indian Ocean purse seine skipjack fishery – 1st Surveillance audit report</u>.

⁵ Maufroy *et al.* (2015) <u>Large-scale examination of spatio-temporal patterns of drifting fish aggregating devices (dFADs) from tropical tuna fisheries of the Indian and Atlantic Oceans.</u>

⁶ Parc naturel marin de Mayotte (2023) Échouage d'un dispositif de concentration de poissons (DCP) dérivant issu d'un thonier senneur.

⁷ Burt et al. (2020) The costs of removing the unsanctioned import of marine plastic litter to small island states.

⁸ See for instance the meeting reports of the <u>second</u>, <u>third</u>, and <u>fourth</u> Sessions of the IOTC.

 ⁹ IOTC (1999) <u>Resolution 99/01 on the management of fishing capacity and on the reduction of the catch of juvenile bigeye tuna by vessels, including flag of convenience vessels, fishing for tropical tunas in the IOTC area of competence.
 ¹⁰ IOTC (2002) <u>Report of the Seventh Session of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission.</u>
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Last year, the drama that surrounded Resolution 23/02 and its 72-day closure proposal — which went from being supported by 16 votes out of 23 on 5 February 2023 to being objected to by 11 countries and becoming non-binding six months later — epitomized the seemingly impossible progress on this issue. However, **the 72-day closure that would have been implemented thanks to this Resolution remains, in hindsight, a crucial step towards rebuilding tuna populations in the Indian Ocean**:

- A first paper submitted by AZTI ahead of the 5th IOTC Working Group on FADs in October 2023 clearly identifies that: i) purse seiners using FADs have the most impact on the spawning biomass of the three main target species (skipjack, yellowfin, and bigeye tuna; the latter two being overfished since 2015¹¹ and 2022,¹² respectively); and ii) that except for a full closure of all fisheries, a 72-day ban on drifting FADs would be the option yielding the best results in terms of stock rebuilding;¹³
- A second paper submitted by MARBEC and the IOTC Secretariat ahead of the same Working Group goes beyond: a full ban on drifting FADs (scenario 4; surprisingly not discussed further) appears to yield impressive medium-to-long term (> 5 years) results in terms of spawning biomass, recruitment, catch, and fishing effort, far better than any other options discussed.¹⁴

The take-away message here is clear: tuna fisheries and the downstream industry would not only survive a ban on drifting FADs, but they would also rapidly and greatly benefit from it.

Given the currently highly polarized state of play, the issue might not be resolved this year. However, time has come for a radical change. While humankind is confronted with the ever-growing threat of climate breakdown and biodiversity collapse, the IOTC cannot remain stuck in the stalemate the European Union created, and other pressing issues need to be addressed, such as ambitious stock rebuilding plans, a fair allocation of quotas, or mitigating the impact of other fleets that need to transition, such as the gillnet fishery.

According to the IOTC's 'catch and effort' data¹⁵ for purse seiners and bait boats for the years 2020-2022, **94.1%** (± **1.0%) of the FAD-associated catch is made by European fishing companies** (see 'Additional details' at the end of this document). Consequently, the European Union bears sole responsibility on the matter, and should the European Union decide to truly endorse the international objectives it committed to, e.g. the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, it shall unilaterally decide to impose a ban on drifting FADs for all vessels owned or under the control of EU-based companies. As a result, close to 95% of the issue would be resolved in a matter of months, and as evidenced by the aforementioned MARBEC/IOTC's projections, the benefits would be immense, in just a few years, for every single actor in the Indian Ocean:

- Populations of tuna would steadily and rapidly rebuild, and caught individuals would be larger and hence better valued (compared to, e.g. skipjack tuna of 1-1.5 kg that are currently being caught, according to the EU industry);¹⁶
- Bycatch of sensitive species, including threatened sharks and turtles, would be dramatically reduced;
- Ghost fishing, destruction of fragile ecosystems, and electronic pollution would become non-existent;

¹¹ IOTC (2021) <u>Executive summary: Yellowfin tuna (2021)</u>.

¹² IOTC (2022) <u>Executive summary: Bigeye tuna (2022)</u>.

¹³ Correa *et al.* (2023) <u>Responses of tuna stocks to temporal closures in the Indian Ocean</u>.

¹⁴ Tidd et al. (2023) Assessing the response of Indian Ocean yellowfin tuna (Thunnus albacares) stock

to variations in DFAD fishing effort.

¹⁵ <u>IOTC data</u>, version of 5 April 2024.

¹⁶ Atuna (2024) Why disastrous IO catch depresses skipjack prices.



- Even **fuel consumption would decrease**, as it was evidenced that purse seiners were consuming more fuel when using FADs than when fishing on free schools.¹⁷

We know how to do without drifting FADs; banning them does not equate with banning tuna fishing.

Until recently, the French proudly displayed their 'French know-how' in targeting free schools — with larger, more mature individuals, and a much lower bycatch rate of sensitive species — rather than relying on drifting FADs. But since then, due to a nonsensical global tuna market, they abandoned this 'know-how' and became overly dependent on drifting FADs. For instance, according to its MSC certification report, the largest French tuna company, CFTO, caught 96.5% of its volumes around drifting FADs in 2021.¹⁸ Mr. Adrien de Chomereau, CEO of French tuna company Sapmer, once said: "*As few FADs as possible is the path of virtue. But it is economic suicide*".¹⁹ **But what is "economic suicide**" is the current model of European purse seiners: in recent months, two of the three French companies targeting tropical tunas have filed for bankruptcy (Sapmer²⁰ and Via Océan/Saupiquet),²¹ while CFTO (acquired by Dutch giant Parlevliet & van der Plas in 2016) has been bleeding money for years, with losses cumulating 30 million euros in 2020 and 2021 only.²² Yes, **FAD fishing is an economic trap; a trap that the European industry has built itself and in which it fell on its own. Only the European Union can undo this trap and salvage the situation.**

BLOOM hereby not only calls on Members of the IOTC to initiate a quick phase-out of drifting FADs in the Indian Ocean, but also calls on the European Union, in this international forum in which it claims to be a champion, to actually become one. At home, the European Commission, which represents the European Union at the IOTC, should seriously reconsider its position, propose a definitive ban on drifting FADs, and seek endorsement from colegislators. It should also immediately, along with France, withdraw its objection to Resolution 23/02 to show good faith.

In the short, medium, and long term, there are only benefits to yield for humankind and the biosphere, even for those who currently operate such drifting FADs or depend on them downstream.

¹⁷ Basurko et al. (2022) Fuel consumption of free-swimming school versus FAD strategies in tropical tuna purse seine fishing.

¹⁸ MSC (2023) <u>CFTO Indian Ocean purse seine skipjack fishery – 1st surveillance audit report</u>

¹⁹ Ortscheidt (2016) La Sapmer à la croisée des chemins.

²⁰ Grollier (2023) En vente, l'armement Sapmer réduit la voilure.

²¹ Jourdain (2024) Cessation d'activité chez Via océan : mobilisation des marins et sédentaires à Concarneau.

²² See their net results, available at: <u>https://www.pappers.fr/entreprise/compagnie-francaise-du-thon-oceanique-376580585</u>.



ADDITIONAL DETAILS

BLOOM is a non-profit organization founded in 2005 that works to preserve the marine environment and species from unnecessary destruction, and to increase social benefits in the fishing sector. BLOOM wages awareness and advocacy campaigns to accelerate the adoption of concrete solutions for the ocean, humans, and the climate. BLOOM carries out scientific research projects, independent studies and evaluations that highlight crucial and unaddressed issues such as the financing mechanisms of the fishing sector. BLOOM's actions are meant for the general public as well as policymakers and economic stakeholders.

As part of our research and advocacy campaigns, we have a keen interest in tropical tuna fisheries, especially those that occur within the IOTC area of competence.²³ Since November 2022, we have published a series of reports covering a case of illegal secondment between the French administration and the European tuna lobby,²⁴ the dynamics in IOTC delegations,²⁵ the lack of enforcement of EU rules by European fleets,²⁶ the role that the EU has in the continuous overexploitation of tuna populations in the Indian Ocean,²⁷ the out-of-control 'technological creep' of the FADs used by the European fleets,²⁸ the violations of human rights that occurred worldwide in tuna fisheries,²⁹ the role of the MSC label in certifying destructive fisheries,³⁰ the role of European retailers in the current state of play,³¹ a comparative analysis of the socio-economic and ecological footprint of European industrial fishing and Maldivian coastal fishing for tropical tuna,³² and the complexity and opacity of the tuna trade, focusing on the Seychelles.³³

Below, we provide additional details that support our statement above.

²³ We have a dedicated newsletter covering our work in Africa and in the Indian Ocean, in French (<u>https://bloomassociation.org/nos-campagnes/peche-en-afrique/newsletter-afrique/</u>) and English (<u>https://bloomassociation.org/nos-campagnes/peche-en-afrique/african-fisheries-newsletter/</u>).

²⁴ BLOOM (2022) <u>The wild west of tuna fisheries in Africa — The sheer power of an outlawed industrial sector. The guilt of a complicit administration</u>.

²⁵ BLOOM (2023) <u>Powerful, neo-colonial, pervasive... The EU under the rule of tuna lobbies</u>.

²⁶ BLOOM (2023) Eyes wide shut — Statistics finally made available show that the French State does not monitor its distant water fleets in Africa.

²⁷ BLOOM (2023) Lining up the ducks — Industrial tuna fishing lobbies line up their political allies to defend their destructive practices in <u>Africa</u>.

²⁸ BLOOM (2023) <u>Tuna war games — The story of a fatal technological race against tuna and marine life</u>.

²⁹ BLOOM (2023) Canned brutality — Human rights abuses in the tuna industry.

³⁰ BLOOM (2023) <u>The death label — The MSC's fake sustainability but true destruction of tuna populations</u>.

³¹ BLOOM (2023) <u>Willful ignorance — How European retailers turn a blind eye to the social-ecological destructiveness of tuna fisheries</u>.

³² BLOOM (2024) From heaven to hell — A comparative analysis of the socio-economic and ecological footprint between the European

industrial fishing and Maldivian coastal fishing for tropical tuna.

³³ BLOOM (2024) <u>The tuna's black box — Knowns, unknowns and discrepancies in the tuna trade</u>.



Juvenile catch

According to the IOTC 'size-frequency' data,³⁴ the proportion of juvenile individuals in the FAD-association catch of purse seiners vs. free-swimming shools is as follows: 99.7% vs. 61.4% for bigeye tuna, 95.9% vs. 32.1% for yellowfin tuna, and 33.9% vs. 16.7% for skipjack tuna.



Proportion of juveniles in the catch of purse seiners FAD-associated (black) vs. free-swimming shools (gre

Source: IOTC 'size-frequency' data Figure 1. Proportion of juveniles in the catch of purse seiners, 2000-2022.

³⁴ IOTC data, version of 2 April 2024.

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Who is using drifting FADs?

According to the IOTC 'catch and effort' data³⁵ for surface fisheries (i.e. purse seine and bait boat) for the last available years (2020-2022), it appears that the FAD-associated catch is made by the following countries: Spain ($38.2\% \pm 2.5\%$), the Seychelles ($34.0\% \pm 1.1\%$), France ($16.3\% \pm 1.9\%$), Mauritius ($5.6\% \pm 1.0\%$), South Korea ($4.5\% \pm 0.4\%$), Indonesia ($1.3\% \pm 0.6\%$), and Japan (0.2%; Figure 2). However, according to the IOTC register of authorized vessels, the entire fleet of purse seiners registered in 2020-2022 in the Seychelles and Mauritius was owned by the very same companies that own the purse seiners registered in Spain and France (see Table 1 on next page). Therefore, it can be said that European fishing companies account for 94.1% ($\pm 1.0\%$) of the FAD-associated catch, whereas fleets from other countries only account for 5.9% ($\pm 1.0\%$).



Proportion of FAD-associated catch by fleet

Source: IOTC 'catch and effort' data for surface fisheries

Figure 2. Proportion of FAD-associated catch by fleet (%) for the years 2020 to 2022.

³⁵ IOTC data, version of 5 April 2024.

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Ownership of purse seiners registered in coastal countries of the Indian Ocean (2020-2022)

Table 1. Ownership of purse seiners registered in the Seychelles and Mauritius in 2020-2022.

Country	Vessel name	IMO number ^a	MMSI number ^a	Owner	Owner's country	Union ^ь	Comment
Mauritius	ALBACAN	8906468	645683000	Albacora	Spain	OPAGAC	
	BELLE ISLE	9679634	645374000	Sapmer	France	Orthongel	Ware recently sold to operate in the Pacific Ocean
	BELLE RIVE	9679622	645373000	Sapmer	France	Orthongel	
	BELOUVE	9653848	645524000	Sapmer	France	Orthongel	
Seychelles	ARTZA	9202144	664271000	Atunsa	Spain	ANABAC	
	DRACO	9335226	664348000	Albacora	Spain	OPAGAC	
	EUSKADI ALAI	9733480	664578000	Echebastar	Spain	ANABAC	
	GALERNA II	9663154	664576000	Albacora	Spain	OPAGAC	
	GALERNA III	9663166	664584000	Albacora	Spain	OPAGAC	
	INTERTUNA TRES	9202704	664223000	Albacora	Spain	OPAGAC	
	IZARO	9684500	664563000	Echebastar	Spain	ANABAC	
	JAI ALAI	9733478	664579000	Echebastar	Spain	ANABAC	
	MORN SESELWA	9719800	312360000	Sapmer	France	Orthongel	Currently PLAYA DE LAGA, owned by Pevasa
	MORNE BLANC	9719812	312257000	Sapmer	France	Orthongel	Currently PLAYA DE LAIDA, owned by Pevasa
	PLAYA DE ANZORAS	9176917	664572000	Pevasa	Spain	ANABAC	
	TXORI AUNDI	8208531	664268000	Inpesca (29% owned by Albacora)	Spain	OPAGAC	
	TXORI TOKI	9196682	664326000	Inpesca (29% owned by Albacora)	Spain	OPAGAC	

^aSource: Marine Traffic.

^bSource: ORBIS.