
**SWIOTUNA POSITION STATEMENT TO THE 28TH SESSION OF THE INDIAN OCEAN TUNA
COMMISSION(IOTC)**

Bangkok, Thailand

13th -17th May 2024



The Context

As IUU fishing continues to threaten the sustainability of fisheries in the Indian Ocean, the upcoming IOTC meeting in Bangkok provides a critical platform to address these challenges. Recognized internationally as a major crime, IUU fishing not only incurs economic losses estimated between US\$26 and US\$50 billion annually worldwide but also undermines food security and economic stability in coastal regions dependent on fisheries. This issue distorts market prices, fosters unfair competition, and depletes local resources, affecting subsistence and small-scale fishers who constitute the majority of the Indian Ocean's fisheries workforce. These fishers are vital to the region's food security and local economies, contributing up to 56% of the annual average tuna catches.

Effective management of Tuna and Tuna-Like species, under the stewardship of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) established in 1996, is pivotal. However, despite various efforts including onboard vessel

observers, increased marine patrols, and international agreements like the FAO Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA), challenges persist. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) like SWIOTUNA and WWF play an instrumental role in enhancing these efforts through grassroots actions, advocacy, and public awareness campaigns.

Key issues and recommendations

1. Stringent measures for IOTC IUU Listed Vessels

SWIOTUNA take note of the Provisional IOTC IUU Vessel List (List_02-05-2023) whereby a total of 14 vessels are listed[1]. SWIOTUNA is concerned that most of the IUU activities reported among others include fishing in closed areas, fishing in coastal states waters without authorization and incorrect gear markings in contravention of IOTC tuna conservation and management measures. Further, SWIOTUNA takes note that the non-punitive measures were imposed on these IUU-listed vessels, namely, verbal warning, instructions to leave the zones of concern and non-deterrent fines and penalties.

SWIOTUNA is concerned that such measures are not punitive and deterrent enough and urges IOTC member states to make IUU fishing an unattractive and costly venture by imposing hefty fines and penalties for non-compliance.

2.0 Comprehensive assessment of the environmental and socio-economic impact of IUU fishing in the IOTC area of competency.

SWIOTUNA is concerned that over the years IOTC has been developing and adopting decisions aimed at promoting sustainable development, conservation and management of tuna resources within the IOTC area of competency. Unfortunately, compliance with a large proportion of these has been low. The tuna stocks continue to decline. Until recently, it was only yellowfin tuna (*Thunnus albacares*) in the red. The IOTC bigeye tuna (*Thunnus obesus*) status report indicates that the stock is now overfished[2]. The stock status of most of the tuna and tuna-like stocks under the IOTC are not clear and most species have not been assessed.

Whereas the decline of stocks has been associated with overcapacity and poor governance, the contribution of IUU fishing in the depletion of tuna stocks in the IOTC area of competency is scarce and not well documented.

SWIOTUNA urges IOTC CPCs to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the extend, contribution and impact of IUU fishing on the tuna and tuna-like species in the IOTC area of competency while taking into consideration ecosystem and socio-economic aspects. SWIOTUNA believes that the information generated from this assessment would provide further insights to inform transformative and innovative strategies to address IUU fishing by IOTC CPCs in collaboration with the relevant partners and stakeholders including civil society organizations, small-scale fishers, the private sector and development partners.

3.0 Enhance transparency in fisheries through the implementation of the Electronic Catch Document Scheme (e-CDS)

Effective enforcement mechanisms and structures implemented by Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) are meant to enhance compliance with fishing regulations among their respective CPCs. The 3rd Meeting of the IOTC Catch Documentation Scheme (CDS) Working Group held in February 2020[3] recommended among others establishment of the CDS for Tunas under the IOTC management. The IOTC 17th Session of the IOTC Compliance Committee endorsed the recommendations including the establishment of CDS. One of the most effective mechanisms for monitoring catches and preventing IUU fishing is the adoption of electronic Catch Documentation Schemes (e-CDS). Electronic CDS complements conventional Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS) systems. The e-CDS enhances real-time monitoring and improves transparency of fishing operations along the value chains and drastically reduces IUU fishing and related administrative costs.

SWIOTUNA endorses the recommendations of the IOTC CDSWG03R and the joint position statement to the 28th IOTC Commission meeting by the Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF), the Pew Charitable Trust, OCEANA and WWF[4] calling upon IOTC CPCS to improve traceability and transparency in their fishing operations by adopting electronic Catch Documentation Schemes (e-CDS) to curb IUU fishing in the IOTC area. SWIOTUNA further urges the IOTC CPCS to progress without much delay in the implementation of the IOTC CDS strategy while taking into consideration the circumstances and special needs of small-scale and artisanal tuna fishers to implement such measures. In so implementing the CDS, priority should be given to the IOTC species that are overfished and or experiencing overfishing, in particular yellowfin and bigeye tunas.

[1] IOTC. 2023. Provisional IOTC IUU Vessels List_02-05-2023

[2] IOTC. 2023. Executive Summary: Bigeye Tuna. IOTC Secretariat, Seychelles.

[3] IOTC. 2024. IOTC – 2024 – WPICMM 07 – 07: progress of work and plan for 2024 of the Catch Documentation Scheme (CDS) Working Group (WG). IOTC Secretariat, Seychelles.

[4] EJF, OCEANA, PEW, WWF. 2024. Call for the IOTC to support stronger transparency and anti-IUU measures.



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