
OUTCOMES OF THE 26th SESSION OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

PREPARED BY: IOTC SECRETARIAT, 20 MAY 2024

PURPOSE

To inform participants at the 6th Meeting of the Working Group on FADs (WGFAD06) of the recommendations arising from the 26th Session of the IOTC Scientific Committee (SC) held from 4 -8 December 2023, specifically relating to the work of the WGFAD.

BACKGROUND

At the 26th Session of the SC, the SC noted and considered the recommendations made by the WPTT in 2023 that included requests to address the deficiencies in data collection, monitoring and reporting by CPCs, as well as to carry out targeted research and analysis on FADs. The recommendations on the deficiencies in data collection, monitoring and reporting by CPCs in relation FADs will be discussed in paper IOTC–2024–WGFAD06-05 and are therefore not presented in this paper.

The SC also made a recommendation to the Commission to consider the impact of various fishery closure scenarios, based on quantitative analyses conducted by FAD05 and WPTT 25, which examined the recovery prospects for three species of tropical tuna under different closure modalities and assumptions.

DISCUSSION

The following extracts from the SC26 Report (2023) are provided here for the consideration and action of the WGFAD04:

Update in the WGFAD04 and WGFAD05

96. The SC **NOTED** the report of the 4th and 5th working group meetings on FADs (IOTC-2023-WGFAD04-R and IOTC-2023-WGFAD05-R). The meetings were attended by 75 and 116 participants respectively (cf. 111 in 2022).

97. The SC **NOTED** that, in response to Resolutions 23/02 and 23/03, a workplan was created to assess the effects of FAD closure during WGFAD04. Following the completion of the analyses by scientists, the WPFAD05 examined the findings and requested more analyses, which were subsequently completed and reviewed by WPTT25.

98. The SC **NOTED** that the analysis focused on the recovery of the three species of tropical tuna under various fishery closure modality and assumptions (e.g., whether there is a redistribution of catches among seasons). Nevertheless, the analysis was not meant to address a specific number of days of closure for a specific gear.

99. The SC **NOTED** the quantitative analyses presented during the meeting (IOTC-2023-WGFAD05-13 and IOTC-2023-WPTT25-INF08). The analyses which were all conducted with a 10 year time frame indicated that the most positive impact on the stocks for the three tuna species, in order of the largest to smallest benefits, would be (i) a three-month complete closure for all gears, (ii) a two-month complete closure for all gears, and (iii) a three-month oceanwide PS log school closure. In addition, several scenarios with closures applied to other gears also achieve the objective of recovering bigeye and yellowfin to the green quadrant of the Kobe plot in 10 years. However, the SC **NOTED** that these benefits were estimated under the assumption that there would not be an increase in catches from other gears during this time and further **NOTED** that the full benefits of these closures would only be seen if there is no reallocation of catches to other gears or time periods. The analyses further indicated that the period that would result in the best outcomes from the closure would be during Q1, Q3 and Q4 for BET and YFT and Q3 and Q4 for SKJ. In addition, the SC **RECALLED** that Resolution 23/03 (para. 3) states that “The IOTC Scientific Committee shall provide advice and recommendations no later than 31st December 2023 on appropriate fishing closures applicable to all fishing gears.” As such the SC **RECOMMENDED** the Commission take these analyses into account, with results shown in Annex IX of the WPTT report (IOTC-2023-WPTT25-R) and Figures a-c (below), and **REQUESTED** the WPTT to consider conducting further analysis intersessionally to assess the impacts of all gears

on stock status so that this issue can be comprehensively addressed. The SC **NOTED** that some artisanal fleets may struggle to implement closures due to socio-economic dependence on the resources and so **REQUESTED** that the WGFAD look into excluding artisanal fleets from future analyses.

100. The SC **NOTED** that the quantitative analysis was based on the stock assessments for each species and therefore the gear groupings were the same as those used in the stock assessments. The SC also **NOTED** that in the case of BET, the majority of the catch in the gear group BB+PS(AFAD) was contributed by small purse seiners operating on AFADs while catch contributed from BB is small.

101. The SC **NOTED** that the Jelly-FAD is an example of how the implementation of biodegradable DFADs can be achieved, further **NOTING** that other actions have been also carried out in the Indian Ocean for BIOFAD testing using alternative designs and materials and this work has been presented to the WGFAD and WPEB for many years. The SC further **NOTED** that the IATTC has recently adopted a step-wise approach to the full adoption of biodegradable DFADs (IATTC C-23-04). The SC therefore **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission initiate an ambitious step-wise approach for the implementation of biodegradable DFADs as soon as possible.

102. The SC **NOTED** that some delegations expressed the view that that WGFAD05 was not thought to be optimal in the sense that it is not as purely scientific as it should be. There was also a mixture of scientific and opinion papers and a mixture of debate in those topics, with the opinion papers being disproportionately long. The SC **NOTED** the suggestion that there should be a clear division between scientific and opinion topics at future meetings, that papers should be carefully chosen for each topic at the chair's discretion in collaboration with the IOTC Secretariat, and that sufficient time should be allotted for scientific discussions.

103. On this subject, the SC **NOTED** that an observer presented a different viewpoint, arguing that there shouldn't be a limited definition or viewpoint on what constitutes science and that the availability of data access, the capacity for independent data analysis, and other factors should all be considered in scientific discussions.

RECOMMENDATION

That the WGFAD:

- 1) **NOTE** paper IOTC–2024–WGFAD06–03 which outlined the main outcomes of the 26th Session of the Scientific Committee, specifically related to the work of the WGFAD.
- 2) **CONSIDER** how best to progress these issues at the present meeting.