Report of the 1st Special Session of the IOTC Scientific Committee

Online, 26 February 2025

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ACRONYMS

ACAP	Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels
AFAD	Anchored Fish Aggregation Device
ASPIC	A Stock-Production Model Incorporating Covariates
B	Biomass (total)
B_{MSY}	Biomass which produces MSY
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CCAMLR	Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources
CCSBT	Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna
CE	Catch and Effort
CI	Confidence interval
CKMR	Close-Kin-Mark-Recapture
CMM	Conservation and Management Measure (of the IOTC; Resolutions and Recommendations)
CoC	Compliance Committee
CPCs	Contracting Parties and Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties
CPUE	Catch Per Unit Effort
current	Current period/time, i.e. $F_{current}$ means fishing mortality for the current assessment year
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EM/EMS	Electronic Monitoring/Electronic Monitoring System
ERA	Ecological Risk Assessment
EU	European Union
F	Fishing mortality; F_{2010} is the fishing mortality estimated in the year 2010
FAD	Fish Aggregation device
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FL	Fork Length
F_{MSY}	Fishing mortality at MSY
GLM	Generalised Linear Model
HCR	Harvest Control Rule
HBF	Hooks Between Floats
HS	Harvest Strategy
HSF	Harvest Strategy Framework
IATTC	Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission
ICCAT	International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas
IO	Indian Ocean
IOTC	Indian Ocean Tuna Commission
IOSEA	Indian Ocean - South-East Asian Marine Turtle Memorandum
IPA	International Plan of Action
IPNLF	International Pole and Line Foundation
ISSF	International Seafood Sustainability Foundation
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
IUU	Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported (fishing)
LJFL	Lower-jaw fork length
LRP	Limit reference point
LL	Longline
LSTLV	Large-scale Tuna Longline Vessel
M	Natural mortality
MEY	Maximum Economic Yield
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MP	Management Procedure
MPA	Marine Protected Area
MSPEA	Maldives Seafood Processors and Exporters Association
MPF	Meeting Participation Fund
MSE	Management Strategy Evaluation
MSY	Maximum Sustainable Yield
n.a.	Not Applicable
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPOA	National Plan of Action
OFCF	Overseas Fishery Cooperation Foundation of Japan
OM	Operating Model
OT	Overseas Territory

PS	Purse seine
PSA	Productivity Susceptibility Analysis
q	Catchability
RBC	Recommended Biological Catch
RFMO	Regional Fisheries Management Organisation
ROS	Regional Observer Scheme
RTTP-IO	Regional Tuna Tagging Project of the Indian Ocean
SB	Spawning stock Biomass (sometimes expressed as SSB)
SB_{MSY}	Spawning stock Biomass which produces MSY
SC	Scientific Committee (of the IOTC)
SCAF	Standing Committee on Administration and Finance (of the IOTC)
SE	Standard Error
SWIOFC	South West Indian Ocean Fisheries Commission
SS3	Stock Synthesis III
SSB	Spawning stock biomass
TAC	Total Allowable Catch
TAE	Total Allowable Effort
Taiwan,China	Taiwan, Province of China
TCAC	Technical Committee on Allocation Criteria
TCMP	Technical Committee on Management Procedures
tRFMO	tuna Regional Fisheries Management Organization
TRP	Target Reference Point
TrRP	Trigger Reference Point
UN	United Nations
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
VMS	Vessel Monitoring System
WP	Working Party (of the IOTC)
WPB	Working Party on Billfish
WPEB	Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch
WPDCS	Working Party on Data Collection and Statistics
WPFC	Working Party on Fishing Capacity
WPM	Working Party on Methods
WPNT	Working Party on Neritic Tunas
WPTmT	Working Party on Temperate Tunas
WPTT	Working Party on Tropical Tunas

STANDARDISATION OF IOTC WORKING PARTY AND SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE REPORT TERMINOLOGY

SC16.07 (para. 23) The SC **ADOPTED** the reporting terminology contained in Appendix IV and **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission considers adopting the standardised IOTC Report terminology, to further improve the clarity of information sharing from, and among its subsidiary bodies.

HOW TO INTERPRET TERMINOLOGY CONTAINED IN THIS REPORT

Level 1: From a subsidiary body of the Commission to the next level in the structure of the Commission:

RECOMMENDED, RECOMMENDATION: Any conclusion or request for an action to be undertaken, from a subsidiary body of the Commission (Committee or Working Party), which is to be formally provided to the next level in the structure of the Commission for its consideration/endorsement (e.g. from a Working Party to the Scientific Committee; from a Committee to the Commission). The intention is that the higher body will consider the recommended action for endorsement under its own mandate, if the subsidiary body does not already have the required mandate. Ideally this should be task specific and contain a timeframe for completion.

Level 2: From a subsidiary body of the Commission to a CPC, the IOTC Secretariat, or other body (not the Commission) to carry out a specified task:

REQUESTED: This term should only be used by a subsidiary body of the Commission if it does not wish to have the request formally adopted/endorsed by the next level in the structure of the Commission. For example, if a Committee wishes to seek additional input from a CPC on a particular topic, but does not wish to formalise the request beyond the mandate of the Committee, it may request that a set action be undertaken. Ideally this should be task specific and contain a timeframe for the completion.

Level 3: General terms to be used for consistency:

AGREED: Any point of discussion from a meeting which the IOTC body considers to be an agreed course of action covered by its mandate, which has not already been dealt with under Level 1 or level 2 above; a general point of agreement among delegations/participants of a meeting which does not need to be considered/adopted by the next level in the Commission's structure.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 1st Session of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) Scientific Committee (SC) was held online on 26 February 2025. A total of 78 delegates and other participants attended the Session, comprised of 70 delegates from 16 Contracting Parties with no delegates from Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties, and 8 participants from 5 observer organisations (including the invited experts). The meeting was opened by the Chairperson, Dr Toshihide Kitakado (Japan). The list of participants is provided at Appendix 1.

The following are the recommendations regarding stock status from the 1st Session of the Scientific Committee

BIGEYE TUNA MP (RESOLUTION 22/03)

SSC.01 (para. 15) The SC **NOTED** that the application of the bigeye management procedure generated an unconstrained estimated TAC of 175,005 t which is more than 15% higher than the TAC set for 2024 and 2025. The SC **NOTED** that by applying the maximum 15% change in the TAC as per Resolution 22/03, the MP recommended a TAC of 92,670 t. per year for 2026-2028. Therefore, the SC **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission adopt the TAC advice for Bigeye tuna of 92,670 t resulting from the MP.

SSC.02 (para. 21) **NOTING** that the CPUE standardisation conducted by the joint CPUE working group differs slightly from the specified methods in the MP (Williams et al., 2022), the SC **RECOMMENDED** that a fixed set of CPUE standardization code is developed for each MP to ensure that it is developed following the specifications of the MP.

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE 1ST SPECIAL SESSION OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

SSC.03 (para. 31) The SC **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission consider the consolidated set of recommendations arising from SSC01, provided at Appendix 4.

1. OPENING OF THE SESSION

1. The 1st Special Session of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) Scientific Committee (SC) was held online on 26 February 2025. A total of 78 delegates and other participants attended the Session, comprised of 70 delegates from 16 Contracting Parties with no delegates from Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties, and 8 participants from 5 observer organisations (including the invited experts). The meeting was opened by the Chairperson, Dr Toshihide Kitakado (Japan). The list of participants is provided at Appendix 1.

2. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE SESSION

2. The SC **ADOPTED** the Agenda provided at Appendix 2. The documents presented to the SC are listed in Appendix 3.

3. ADMISSION OF OBSERVERS

3. The SC admitted the following observers, in accordance with Rule XIV of the IOTC Rules of Procedure (2014):

3.1 Non-governmental and Inter-governmental Organisations (NGOs)

- International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF)
- Marine Stewardship Council
- Sustainable Fisheries and Communities Trust (SFACT)
- Invited Experts
- EUROPECHE

4. BIGEYE TUNA MP

4.1 Resolution 22/03

4. The SC **NOTED** the presentation by the Chair of the Working Party on Methods which provided an update on the 2025 running of the bigeye management procedure for 2024.

5. The SC **NOTED** that Resolution 22/03 on a bigeye management procedure includes an adopted Management Procedure (MP) schedule that requires the MP to be run by the IOTC Scientific Committee in 2024, through the Working Party on Methods and Working Party on Tropical Tunas, including a review of exceptional circumstances, to derive a recommended TAC for 2026, 2027 and 2028 for IOTC Commission consideration.

6. The SC **NOTED** that a standardised catch per unit effort (CPUE) index based on the agreed methodology (as per Resolution 22/03) was not available to run the bigeye (BET) Tuna MP in 2024 in time for the Scientific Committee to review. As agreed and recommended by the SC in 2024, the joint CPUE group responsible for producing the index held their meeting in February 6-12 2025, and produced the BET CPUE index, as per Resolution 22/03 (IOTC-2024-SCC01-04). The index was presented to the WPM(MSE) Taskforce meeting in 24-25 February 2025 which reviewed and ran the BET MP (IOTC-2024-SCC01-02).

7. The SC **NOTED** that some operational changes have been observed in the Taiwanese fleet. The SC **NOTED** that these are a result of the increased capacity on some small-scale vessels to provide more space for crew, but **NOTED** that the fishing practices, as well as catch rates of these vessels might have been impacted. Therefore, the joint CPUE workshop suggested not to use the data from these vessels in the CPUE index.

8. The SC **NOTED** there were some minor methodological changes from the agreed CPUE specifications of the MP (i.e., the use of lognormal instead of delta model due to time constrains and the exclusion of some Taiwanese vessels due to the operational changes since 2021), however, the SC **NOTED** that it follows the CPUE standardisation approach as adopted in the bigeye MP.

9. The SC **NOTED** that the CPUE trend estimated in 2025 for all regions is very similar to the joint CPUE series in the 2019 stock assessment, but there were some noticeable differences over the last 10 years of the CPUE series developed in 2022 (when the bigeye MP was run the first time). The SC **NOTED** that the joint CPUE trend this year was developed using operational level data (as was the case in the 2019 series), whereas the series

in 2022 was aggregated without the use of operational data as a result of the constraints imposed by the pandemic. The SC further **NOTED** that the MSE was tested using the CPUE derived from operational level data.

10. The SC **NOTED** that while there was a slight difference in the estimation of the CPUE series, the main differences are likely to be derived from the data used (operational vs. aggregated). The SC **NOTED** that the impact of these changes needs to be investigated in order to produce consistent CPUE series in future.

11. The SC **NOTED** that any large changes in CPUE are investigated through the examination of exceptional circumstances.

12. The SC **NOTED** that an external expert and the Secretariat were invited to participate in the CPUE standardization workshop which addresses one of the concerns expressed by the SC in 2024 regarding the transparency of this process.

13. The SC **NOTED** the two data inputs to run the bigeye MP were catch data and the joint CPUE index. The SC **NOTED** the formula used in the MP to determine the recommended Total Allowable Catch (TAC). The SC **NOTED** that three parameters in the MP are derived from the internal estimation model (FMSY ratio, By and HCRmult), and the fourth parameter (Fmult) is a fixed tuning parameter. The SC further **NOTED** that the Pella-Tomlinson biomass dynamic internal estimation model converged and was robust to the initial parameter values (the full MP specifications is provided in Williams et al., 2022).

14. The SC **NOTED** that to run the BET MP, a Pella-Tomlinson biomass dynamic model was first fitted to the catch and the longline CPUE index to estimate (within the MP model) stock depletion, and then the harvest control rule ($TAC_{new} = B_y\left(1 - exp(-F_{mult} \times HCR_{mult} \times F_{MSY}ratio)\right)$) was used to calculate the TAC, and finally the 15% maximum TAC change constraint was applied. The SC **NOTED** that the data input to the MP is consistent with the stock assessment (the longline CPUE index was combined across the four regional indices used in the assessment), and the internal estimation model of the MP fits well to these data.

15. The SC **NOTED** that the application of the bigeye management procedure generated an unconstrained estimated TAC of 175,005 t which is more than 15% higher than the TAC set for 2024 and 2025. The SC **NOTED** that by applying the maximum 15% change in the TAC as per Resolution 22/03, the MP recommended a TAC of 92,670 t. per year for 2026-2028. Therefore, the SC **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission adopt the TAC advice for Bigeye tuna of 92,670 t resulting from the MP.

16. The SC **NOTED** the large difference between the previous TAC and this new recommended TAC. The SC **NOTED** that the CPUE series has a primary effect in the outputs of the MP and the increasing trend observed in the recent 3 years of the CPUE series will be driving this increased TAC due to the optimistic abundance trend observed in the CPUE. The SC further **NOTED** that catches in recent years have also been increasing which (along with the CPUE trend) the model would have interpreted as an increase in biomass.

17. The SC **NOTED** that the CPUE is within the MSE range investigated for the recent years 2021-2023. However, the SC also **NOTED** a positive exceptional circumstance because the CPUE is above the expected range of values in 2019 and 2020 and was slightly outside the range of values tested during the MSE process, which may have an impact of a slightly higher TAC resulting from the MP. However, the SC **NOTED** that the constraint in the MP on a TAC change of 15% will act to constrain any excessive response to these higher CPUE values to ensure that a conservative TAC is recommended.

18. As such, the SC **AGREED** that no further actions are required to proceed with the recommended TAC from the BET MP.

19. The SC **NOTED** that a wide range of unconstrained TACs were generated in the MSE testing of the MP, with the upper TAC change constraint (15%) being triggered frequently. The SC also **NOTED** that the 2025 unconstrained TAC was within the range generated in the MSE testing, and that the 15% maximum TAC change acts as an important buffer to maintain a more stable TAC setting process.

20. The SC **NOTED** that the TAC change constraint rules are used in MPs in other Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) to ensure the stability of the TAC which is an objective of many MPs. The SC further

NOTED that the upper bound has been hit on occasion in other RFMOs and as such this constraint is a critical part of the MP determination of TACs.

21. **NOTING** that the CPUE standardisation conducted by the joint CPUE working group differs slightly from the specified methods in the MP (Williams et al., 2022), the SC **RECOMMENDED** that a fixed set of CPUE standardization code is developed for each MP to ensure that it is developed following the specifications of the MP.

4.2 Resolution 23/04

22. The SC **NOTED** Document IOTC-2025-SSC01-03, which outlines an analysis assessing the impact of replacing catches from FAD fishery on the Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) for bigeye tuna, in response to a request from the Commission, In accordance with Resolution 23/04.

23. The SC **RECALLED** the requests made by Resolution 23/04:

    "(Para. 13) The IOTC Scientific Committee shall conduct a comparative analysis of the contribution of all fishing gears to the mortality of bigeye tuna, which shall include both absolute and relative contributions to mortality and stock depletion.

    (Para. 14) The IOTC Scientific Committee shall develop a table as shown in Annex 2 that quantifies the expected impact on maximum sustainable yield (MSY) and SSBmsy for bigeye tuna resulting from replacing fishing mortality/catches of any major fishing gear/fishery (e.g., Longline, DFAD fisheries, AFAD fisheries, Purse seine on free school, other fisheries) for consideration by the Commission at its 2025 Session. The IOTC Scientific Committee shall also provide advice on FAD management options, including on, limits on FADs sets, that may be necessary to achieve a replacement of fishing mortality of FAD fisheries with free school fisheries. This analysis shall be conducted for DFADs and AFADs fleets separately"

24. The SC **NOTED** that a previous analysis that was undertaken on fishing impact plots (Figure 2. in IOTC-2023-WGFAD05-13) will fulfil the request of Para. 13 above.

25. The SC **NOTED** that the reference case of the 2022 bigeye tuna stock assessment was utilised to estimate the impact on MSY resulting from reattributing catches from the purse seine fish aggregating device (FAD) fisheries to other fisheries. While Resolution 23/04 requested separate analyses for drifting fish aggregating devices (DFADs) and anchored fish aggregating devices (AFADs), the IOTC has yet to receive any specific catch data for AFADs. As such, the assessment model did not distinguish a fishery or fleet specifically for AFADs.

26. The SC **NOTED** that the analysis attributed catch from "BB" (Bait Boats) to AFADs, as it provides a proxy for the AFADs fishery. The SC **NOTED** that the "BB" fishery includes several fleets/gears primarily fishing on AFADs, such as small purse seiners in Indonesia and the pole & line fishery in the Maldives, although the latter constituted only a small fraction of bigeye tuna catches. The "PSLS" (purse seined log school) fishery is characterized as the DFADs fishery in the analysis.

27. The SC **NOTED** that Table 1. of document IOTC-2025-SSC01-03 outlines the estimated changes to both MSY and SSBMSY for four different scenarios of catch redistribution. These changes in MSY fulfil the request in Para. 14 above.

28. The SC **NOTED** that when catches are transferred from fisheries targeting juvenile fish (PSLS and BB) to adult fish (PSFS and LL), in all scenarios there is a positive increase in MSY and SSBMSY. This impact is greater when catch is redistributed from PSLS than BB, due to the difference in overall catch volume (PSLS has a greater volume of catch than BB).

29. The SC **NOTED** that the impact of redistributing catch from the DFAD (PSLS) to LL is greater than from DFAD (PSLS) to PSFS as there is a component of the PSFS fishery that catches juvenile fish, whereas the LL fishery is primarily targeting adults.

30. The SC **NOTED** that there is no such "free-school" modality to capture bigeye tuna in practice and this is probably an important caveat of this theoretical exercise.

31. The SC **ACKNOWLEDGED** the work completed by the Secretariat and thank them for their efforts. **NOTING** that Resolution 23/04 requires a response to the Commission in 2025, the SC **SUGGESTED** that the Commission take note of and consider this analysis. The SC emphasized that this work and its methodology should be further discussed in the relevant working parties (WPTT and WPM) before specific management advice can be formulated.

5. ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE 1ST SPECIAL SESSION OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

32. The SC **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission consider the consolidated set of recommendations arising from SSC01, provided at Appendix 4.

33. The report of the 1st Special Session of the Scientific Committee (IOTC–2025–SSC01–R) was ADOPTED by correspondence.

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APPENDIX 2
AGENDA FOR THE 1ST SPECIAL SESSION OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

Date: 26 February 2025
Location: Online
Time: 12:00 – 14:00
Chair: Dr Toshihide Kitakado (Japan)
Vice-Chair: Dr Fayakun Satria (Indonesia)

1 OPENING OF THE SESSION (Chairperson)

2 ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE SESSION (Chairperson)

3 ADMISSION OF OBSERVERS (Chairperson)

4 **BIGEYE TUNA MP** (IOTC Secretariat)

4.1 Resolution 22/03

4.2 Resolution 23/04

5 ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE 1ST SPECIAL SESSION OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE (IOTC Secretariat)

APPENDIX 3
LIST OF DOCUMENTS

Document	Title
IOTC-2024-SCC01-01	Agenda for the 1st special session of the scientific committee
IOTC-2024-SCC01-02	2025 update on running the IOTC Bigeye Tuna Management Procedure for 2024 (William A, Preece A)
IOTC-2024-SCC01-03	Impact of replacing purse seine fad catches on bigeye tuna MSY (IOTC Secretariat)
IOTC-2024-SCC01-04	Joint CPUE indices for the bigeye tuna in the Indian Ocean based on Japanese, Korean and Taiwanese longline fisheries for use in MP application in IOTC–2025–SSC01 (Kitakado et al.)
IOTC-2024-SCC01-INF01	An update on Consideration of Exceptional Circumstances for the Bigeye Tuna MP 2025 (Preece A, William A)

APPENDIX 4
CONSOLIDATED SET OF RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE 1ST SPECIAL SESSION OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE (26 FEBRUARY 2025) TO THE COMMISSION

STATUS OF TUNA AND TUNA-LIKE RESOURCES IN THE INDIAN OCEAN AND ASSOCIATED SPECIES

BIGEYE TUNA MP (RESOLUTION 22/03)

SSC.01 (para. 15) The SC **NOTED** that the application of the bigeye management procedure generated an unconstrained estimated TAC of 175,005 t which is more than 15% higher than the TAC set for 2024 and 2025. The SC **NOTED** that by applying the maximum 15% change in the TAC as per Resolution 22/03, the MP recommended a TAC of 92,670 t. per year for 2026-2028. Therefore, the SC **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission adopt the TAC advice for Bigeye tuna of 92,670 t resulting from the MP.

SSC.02 (para. 21) **NOTING** that the CPUE standardisation conducted by the joint CPUE working group differs slightly from the specified methods in the MP (Williams et al., 2022), the SC **RECOMMENDED** that a fixed set of CPUE standardization code is developed for each MP to ensure that it is developed following the specifications of the MP.

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE 1ST SPECIAL SESSION OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

SSC.03 (para. 31) The SC **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission consider the consolidated set of recommendations arising from SSC01, provided at Appendix 4.