Report of the 7th IOTC Working Group on FADs

Online, 9 – 10 June 2025

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ACRONYMS

AFAD	Anchored Fish Aggregating Device
ALD	Abandoned, Lost or Discarded
CECOFAD	Catch, effort and ecosystem Impacts of FAD fishing
CMM	Conservation and Management Measures (of the IOTC; Resolutions and Recommendations)
CPCs	Contracting Parties and Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties
CPUE	Catch per unit of effort
DFAD	Drifting Fish Aggregating Device
EMS	Electronic Monitoring Systems
EPO	Eastern Pacific Ocean
FAD	Fish Aggregating Device
FOB	Floating Object
IOTC	Indian Ocean Tuna Commission
MP	Management Procedure
MSE	Management Strategy Evaluation
RFID	Radio Frequency Identifier
RFMO	Regional Fisheries Management Organisation
ROS	Regional Observer Scheme
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
TAC	Total Allowable Catch
WCPO	Western-Central Pacific Ocean

KEY DEFINITIONS

Bycatch	All species, other than the 16 species listed in Annex B of the IOTC Agreement, caught or interacted with by fisheries for tuna and tuna-like species in the IOTC area of competence.
Discards	Any species, whether an IOTC species or bycatch species, which is not retained onboard for sale or consumption.
Large-scale driftnets	Gillnets or other nets or a combination of nets that are more than 2.5 kilometres in length whose purpose is to enmesh, entrap, or entangle fish by drifting on the surface of, or in, the water column.

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.

NOTED/NOTING: Any point of discussion from a meeting which the IOTC body considers to be important enough to record in a meeting report for future reference.

Any other term: Any other term may be used in addition to the Level 3 terms to highlight to the reader of and IOTC report, the importance of the relevant paragraph. However, other terms used are considered for explanatory/informational purposes only and shall have no higher rating within the reporting terminology hierarchy than Level 3, described above (e.g., **CONSIDERED**; **URGED**; **ACKNOWLEDGED**).

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 7th Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) Working Group on FADs (WGFAD) was held online on Zoom from 9-0 June 2025. A total of 72 participants (90 at the 6th Session in 2024, 116 at the 5th session in 2023, 77 at the 4th session in 2023, 111 in 2022, 93 in 2021, and 48 in 2017) attended the Session. The list of participants is provided in Appendix I. The meeting was opened by the Co-Chairs, Mr Avelino Munwane and Dr Gorka Merino, who welcomed participants and formally opened the meeting.

The following are the complete recommendations from the WGFAD07 to the Working Party on Tropical Tunas which are also provided in Appendix VI.

WGFAD07.01 (para 28) **NOTING** that the majority of FADs are mostly found submerged underwater meaning that reading their unique FAD identifier can be challenging, the WGFAD **RECOMMENDED** that the SC consider the following while developing a marking scheme: 1) including redundancy or checkbits in DFAD (and buoy) identifiers to allow errors to be identified; 2) embedding QR codes and Radio Frequency Identifiers (RFIDs) in buoys and potentially DFADs so that they can be easily scanned to avoid errors with manual input of the identifiers; 3) create standards for including the ID marking on DFADs, focusing on putting them as close to the surface as possible to facilitate reading their ID; and 4) assess the feasibility of marking bio-FADs.

WGFAD07.02 (para 53) The WGFAD **REQUESTED** that interested CPCs work within the context of the WPEB to review the voluntary data collection form for ALDFG recovery, proposed by the Secretariat. The WGFAD **RECOMMENDED** that this review should include:

(i) information related to the loss of fishing gear;
(ii) information that would allow the quantitative assessment of the impacts of DFADs and other ALDFG fishing gear in sensitive areas and on entangled individuals (e.g. quantity, fate);
(iii) a complementary study alongside FAD recovery programmes that takes into account the potential actions of local actors and considers the inclusion of recovery vessel category, in order to achieve common ecological goals within a broad fishing gear recovery programme; and
(iv) provide photographic evidence of recovery of stranded gears if possible.

1. OPENING OF THE MEETING

1. The 7th Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) Working Group on FADs (WGFAD) was held online on Zoom from 9-0 June 2025. A total of 72 participants (90 at the 6th Session in 2024, 116 at the 5th session in 2023, 77 at the 4th session in 2023, 111 in 2022, 93 in 2021, and 48 in 2017) attended the Session. The list of participants is provided in Appendix I. The meeting was opened by the Co-Chairs, Mr Avelino Munwane and Dr Gorka Merino, who welcomed participants and formally opened the meeting.

2. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE SESSION

2. The WGFAD **ADOPTED** the Agenda provided in Appendix II. The documents presented to the WGFAD are listed in Appendix III.

3. THE IOTC PROCESS: OUTCOMES, UPDATES AND PROGRESS

3.1 Outcomes of the 27th Session of the Scientific Committee

3. The WGFAD **NOTED** paper IOTC-2025-WGFAD07-03 which summarizes the outcomes the report of the 27th Session of the Scientific Committee (SC27; IOTC–2024–SC27–R), particularly the recommendations specifically related to the work of the WGFAD

> *(Para 115) The SC **NOTED** the report of the 6th working group meetings on FADs (IOTC-2024-WGFAD06-R). The meetings were attended by 90 participants (75 and 116 participants in WGFAD04 and WGFAD05 respectively in 2023).*
>
> *(Para 115) The SC **NOTED** that after the recent resolutions on FAD were adopted, CPCs seem less inclined to submit papers to WGFAD. This led to the shortening of WGFAD06 to a single day and the cancellation of WGFAD07 this year due to a shortage of papers. Therefore, the SC **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission schedule only one WGFAD meeting in 2025. The SC also suggests that this meeting should take place before the WPEB, as FAD issues are relevant to WPEB, to allow the findings to be reported to both WPEB and WPTT.*

3.2 Outcomes of the 29th Session of the Commission and previous decisions of the Commission in relation to FADs

4. The WGFAD **NOTED** paper IOTC-2025-WGFAD07-04 which summarizes the outcomes of the 29th Session of the Commission. The WGFAD **NOTED** the Commission has received an update on the progress made to the development of a DFAD register, as required by the Resolution 24/02 (on Management of Drifting Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) in the IOTC Area of Competence) that was of particular interest to the WGFAD.

5. The WGFAD **NOTED** that during S29, the Commission was informed of a pilot study conducted by the EU, which created a new category of vessels designed to retrieve FADs before they drift into the EEZs of coastal states. The Commission discussed the feasibility of establishing such a vessel category for FAD retrieval and minimizing environmental impact but expressed concerns about the potential for these vessels to increase the capacity or efficiency of supply vessels. The WGFAD **NOTED** that the Commission requested the EU to share the results of the pilot project and tasked the SC with reviewing the potential impact of this activity on the fishing capacity of the purse seine fleet.

6. In response to this request, the WGFAD **AGREED** that the EU should introduce and present the pilot study at the upcoming WPTT meetings, so that the results can be considered in conjunction with discussions on the impact of this potential new vessel category on fishing capacity of the purse seine vessels.

4. REVIEW OF DATA AVAILABLE AT THE SECRETARIAT ON FADS

7. The WGFAD **NOTED** paper IOTC-2025-WGFAD07-05 which provides an overview of data and Information held by the Secretariat on Purse Seine fisheries using Drifting Fish Aggregating Devices in the IOTC Area of Competence.

8. The WGFAD **NOTED** that, in 2024, 48 large-scale purse seiners using DFADs and 14 support vessels were in operation, with a combined fish hold capacity of approximately 75,000 metric tonnes. This corresponds to a ratio of one support vessel for every four purse seiners.

9. The WGFAD **NOTED** that the DFAD purse seine fishery has caught approximately 330,000 tonnes of tropical tuna annually since 2016, with skipjack tuna accounting for about 70% of the total catch in 2023. The contribution of yellowfin tuna to the DFAD catch has declined from around 40% in 2012–2013 to less than 25% in recent years.

10. The WGFAD **ACKNOWLEDGED** that data on daily buoy positions have been consistently reported by all CPCs with purse seine fisheries. Since January 2020, approximately 125,000 distinct buoys have been activated in the Indian Ocean, equating to around 25,000 per year.

11. The WGFAD **ACKNOWLEDGED** that the extent and quality of DFAD-related data reported to the Secretariat have significantly improved following the adoption of Form 3DA, which requires the submission of operational data. The WGFAD **NOTED**, however, that the information provided through the form varies across fleets, highlighting the need for clearer guidelines and enhanced communication between the Secretariat and CPCs.

12. The WGFAD also **NOTED** a lack of new DFAD deployments from some fleets, likely due to a shift in activities focusing more on DFAD transfers rather than new deployments.

13. The WGFAD **AGREED** on the value of developing a data validation tool for Form 3DA and implementing automated procedures for data checks and feedback to CPCs. The WGFAD **ENCOURAGED** the Secretariat to report on progress at the WPDCS or at the next WGFAD meeting

14. The WGFAD **REQUESTED** the Secretariat to provide annual updates on the analysis of information received on DFAD design, specifically regarding the presence of mesh and mesh size.

15. The WGFAD **ACKNOWLEDGED** that IRD has made improvements in compiling DFAD-related data from different sources for the French purse seine fleet, and that the quality of data reported for 2024 is expected to improve.

16. The WGFAD **ENCOURAGED** CPCs to resubmit historical DFAD data to improve the accuracy and completeness of effort-related information.

17. The WGFAD **NOTED** that annual buoy purchase information is not reported to the Secretariat, as this requirement is not included in Resolution 24/02, although it remains binding for Oman under Resolution 19/02. The WGFAD further **NOTED** that such information is typically recorded at the national level, or by member states in the case of the European Union.

18. The WGFAD **ACKNOWLEDGED** that the presentation focused exclusively on 2023 data and anticipated improvements in reporting for 2024, particularly from CPCs operating DFADs, following the training workshop on data reporting for all CPCs held in Indonesia in May 2025.

5. REVIEW OF COMMISSION REQUESTS TO THE SC ON FADS (ALL)

5.1 Resolution 24/02 On Management of Drifting Fish Aggregating Devices (DFADs) in the IOTC Area of Competence

Management plans

19. The WGFAD **NOTED** that Resolution 24/02 requires the SC to provide a scientific review of the DFAD management plan by CPCs.

20. The WGFAD **NOTED** that the Secretariat has received DFAD management plans from a number of CPCs as detailed in Appendix IV.

21. The WGFAD **NOTED** that the received plans, both DFAD and aFAD, have been reviewed by the Compliance Committee and the WGFAD **NOTED** that it is now necessary to determine how to assess these from a scientific perspective.

DFAD register

22. The WGFAD **NOTED** Resolution 24/02 requires the Secretariat to develop a DFAD register, to be implemented from 2026 onwards.

23. The WGFAD **NOTED** that the developers of the DFAD register provided an update on the progress of the DFAD register development.

24. The WGFAD **NOTED** that the register development was split into two parts. The first part involved developing the specifications for the register and developing the prototype which has been completed, is fully functional and has been approved by the Commission. The second phase of the project will begin around September and will involve finalising the register with inputs from interested CPCs as there are some pending technical questions.

25. The WGFAD **NOTED** that the register is focused on the buoys rather than DFAD themselves due to the wording of the Resolution 24/02 which specifically states that the register will be for 'all instrumented buoys deployed'. The WGFAD **NOTED** that the register allows for tracking the number of active DFADs (i.e. the number of DFADs at sea attached to buoys) under the assumption that the buoy remains attached to the DFAD.

26. **Noting** that while it is useful to have the information about buoys deployed, to allow scientists to assess the ecological impacts of the DFADs, the WGFAD **NOTED** the need to estimate the total number of FADs, the type of materials they are built from and whether they are biodegradable. The WGFAD further **NOTED** that it would be useful to know the number of vessels monitoring a single buoy as this information is important for assessing the fishing efficiency but that this is not currently possible in the system. Therefore, the WGFAD **REQUESTED** that more information on the DFADs, their materials and designs and the number of vessels monitoring each FAD be incorporated into the register in the future.

27. The WGFAD **ACKNOWLEDGED** the fact that a number of DFADs are known to have been retrieved by non-industrial or other non-purse seine parties and may be re-appropriated. The WGFAD **NOTED** that this can be recorded as a transfer in the register to allow it to be tracked for the whole life of the DFAD. However, the WGFAD **NOTED** that the system was specifically designed for the purse seine fisheries so other parties would not be likely to change the status of the DFAD in the register and enforcing this is challenging. The WGFAD **NOTED** that it would be possible for CPCs or operators to deactivate the buoy and declare this deactivation in the system if and when they become aware of such a situation.

FAD marking

28. **NOTING** that the majority of FADs are mostly found submerged underwater meaning that reading their unique FAD identifier can be challenging, the WGFAD **RECOMMENDED** that the SC consider the following while developing a marking scheme: 1) including redundancy or checkbits in DFAD (and buoy) identifiers to allow errors to be identified; 2) embedding QR codes and Radio Frequency Identifiers (RFIDs) in buoys and potentially DFADs so that they can be easily scanned to avoid errors with manual input of the identifiers; 3) create standards for including the ID marking on DFADs, focusing on putting them as close to the surface as possible to facilitate reading their ID; and 4) assess the feasibility of marking bio-FADs.

29. The WGFAD **NOTED** the request to the SC with assistance from the WGFAD from the Commission to develop standards for the individual marking of FADs by 2025 (Resolution 24/02, para. 40). The WGFAD **NOTED** that no papers were submitted for the meeting on this topic and therefore **ENCOURAGED** CPCs which fish with DFADs to start to develop a set of marking standards in response to the request of the Commission.

30. The WGFAD **NOTED** that FAO have already developed guidelines on marking fishing gear which could be drawn on for the development of standards for marking of FADs.

31. The WGFAD **NOTED** that most fleets are moving towards using fully biodegradable DFADs and therefore the type of markings for these designs may need to be reconsidered.

32. The WGFAD **NOTED** that due to the long unique identifiers, there are often errors in reading these by observers or captains. The WGFAD **NOTED** that incorporating RFIDs into buoys may provide a solution to reduce these errors.

33. The WGFAD **NOTED** that buoy positions are available to CPCs and could be cross-checked within the database to help identify the correct DFAD identifiers in cases when errors have occurred. The WGFAD further **NOTED** that the register will include mechanisms such as validation rules which will help to avoid errors when inputting DFAD identifiers.

34. The WGFAD **NOTED** that in most cases it should not be necessary for vessels to collect both the DFAD and buoy ID when interacting with it as they should remain the same combination. However, the WGFAD **NOTED** that there have been interactions between DFADs with buoys and non-industrial vessels where either fishing events haven't been recorded or the buoy has been installed on another DFAD (not belonging to the original vessel that deployed it) and that therefore, ideally both IDs should be recorded.

35. The WGFAD **NOTED** that IATTC recently examined the level of errors in the recording of DFAD IDs and found it to be low at around 3-4%. The WGFAD **NOTED** that errors in the input of IDs have been found to be higher for observers than for captains, likely due to the workload of the observers across a range of different activities. The WGFAD therefore **NOTED** that it is particularly important to work to mitigate errors in recording IDs by observers.

36. The WGFAD **NOTED** paper IOTC-2025-WGFAD07-06 which discussed and reviewed the impact of DFAD governance on transboundary ecological issues, with the following abstract provided by the authors:

> "*The rapid expansion of drifting Fish Aggregating Devices (DFADs) in tropical tuna fisheries has generated growing ecological, governance, and compliance challenges, particularly in the Indian Ocean. In response, the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) adopted Resolution 24/02, mandating a regional DFAD Register to enhance transparency, standardize reporting, and limit ecological harm. This paper evaluates the IOTC's proposed registry design (IOTC-2025-S29-*

10_Rev1), identifying key technical and institutional gaps related to coastal state access, environmental harm logging, and enforceability. Drawing on recent empirical and policy literature, the analysis highlights how the current flag-state-centric architecture risks reinforcing historical inequities and undermines real-time accountability. The study proposes a set of structural and procedural enhancements including geospatial monitoring dashboards, timestamped audit trails, ecosystem impact logbooks, and compensation protocols to embed bilateral transparency, scientific review, and ecological responsiveness into the registry's operational logic. The paper concludes by outlining a pathway for developing a technically robust, inclusive, and enforceable DFAD governance framework aligned with IOTC Resolution 24/02."

37. The WGFAD **THANKED** the author for the paper.

5.2 Resolution 23/01 on the management of anchored fish aggregating devices (AFADs)

38. The WGFAD **NOTED** Resolution 23/01 requires the SC to provide a scientific review of the AFAD management plan by CPCs.

39. The WGFAD **ACKNOWLEDGED** that AFAD Management Plans for 2025 had been submitted to the Secretariat by the European Union, Indonesia, Maldives, and Mauritius – details can be seen in Appendix V. The AFAD Management Plans for 2023 are available as an appendix to the document *Summary of compliance with and collection of the anchored fish aggregating devices management plans* presented at the 22nd Session of the Compliance Committee (IOTC-2025-CoC22-08b).

40. The WGFAD **NOTED** that the Management Plans include details on AFADs, including accurate site locations for the European Union, Maldives, and Mauritius. Given the turnover in AFADs, the number of sites reported in the 2025 plans are 43 for Réunion, 1,909 for Indonesia, 65 for Maldives, and 28 for Mauritius.

41. The WGFAD **NOTED** that although most countries with AFADs fisheries submitted management plans in accordance with Resolution 19/02, only one CPC reported data. It was noted that while national authorities collect information related to AFADs activities, such as location and number of FADs, reporting this data remains challenging. WGFAD **ACKNOWLEDGED** these difficulties and **ENCOURAGED** CPCs to share any specific concerns related to data reporting.

42. The WGFAD **CONGRATULATED** the Maldives for reporting detailed information on fishing activities associated with AFADs, in accordance with Annex II of Resolution 23/01. The WGFAD **ACKNOWLEDGED** that the data collection requirements set out in the Resolution are challenging to implement, particularly due to the general absence of recording systems for small vessels operating on AFADs, an issue that was discussed at the 20th Session of the WPDCS (IOTC-2024-WPDCS20-R; paras. 4-6).

43. The WGFAD **NOTED** that a joint project with CSIRO on data collection estimated that approximately 80% of the catch from purse seine fisheries in Indonesia may be derived from AFADs, and that collecting and reporting the operational data required under Resolution 23/01 would be extremely difficult. The WGFAD **ENCOURAGED** CPCs to express their challenges and constraints at the next session of the WPDCS.

44. The WGFAD **NOTED** that paper IOTC-2025-WGFAD07-07 was withdrawn by the authors.

45. The WGFAD **NOTED** Resolution 23/01 requires the SC to provide recommendation on a set of indicators that can be used for AFAD management.

5.3 Development of a form to collect data on ALDFG

46. The WGFAD **NOTED** paper IOTC2025-WGFAD07-10 by the Secretariat, which proposed a form for the collection of data on Abandoned, Lost and Discarded Fishing Gear (ALDFG).

47. The WGFAD **NOTED** that the form proposed in response to the Recommendation 24/11 adopted by the Commission is requesting information on the recovery of ALDFG, also **NOTING** the need to include information on the loss of fishing gear, as well as the possible impact on habitats and species.

48. The WGFAD **NOTED** that observers can report information on entanglements on FADs through the IOTC reporting forms, although this is optional for reporting and therefore scarcely provided.

49. The WGFAD **NOTED** paper IOTC2025-WGFAD07-11, which discussed the data collection for assessing Impacts of FAD stranding events, with the following abstract provided by the authors:

> "*Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) are widely used in tropical tuna purse seine fisheries around the world. These FADs are tracked using echosounder buoys equipped with GPS. When FADs drift out of the fishing grounds, they can reach coastal areas and become stranded. However, few studies have evaluated the impact of stranded FADs on sensitive ecosystems such as coral reefs. The objective of this study is to identify the factors contributing to damage caused by FAD stranding, propose methodologies for assessing their impacts on coral reefs, and establish best practices for data collection. To achieve these objectives, fieldwork was conducted on the coral reef on D´Arros Island and Saint Joseph Atoll in the Indian Ocean, where a methodological framework was developed and tested for potential application in similar marine ecosystems worldwide. The Line Intercept and Photo Quadrat methods were successfully implemented. Based on the in-situ sampling experience, this study presents guidelines for data collection related to FAD stranding events*"

50. The WGFAD **NOTED** the proposed guidelines for collecting data and FAD-related information, as well as the methodology for assessing the impact of FADs on coral reefs. It was **NOTED** that the results from such assessments could be reported, and the methodology is adaptable to other gear types. Furthermore, **NOTING** that recording the date of FAD deployment is particularly useful for estimating the duration a FAD has remained in contact with coral reefs, which helps assess potential damage caused by rope movement due to ocean currents.

51. Additionally, the WGFAD **NOTED** the need for more ideas and methods to improve data collection on FAD entanglement and impacts, including approaches that gather information from both shorelines and other marine habitats.

52. The WGFAD **NOTED** paper IOTC2025-WGFAD07-12, which evaluates the needs for the set up and maintenance of land-based FAD retrieval programs, with the following abstract provided by the authors:

> "*Lost and abandoned fish aggregating devices (FADs) have potential deleterious environmental impacts on the marine environment, particularly FADs built with long lasting synthetic materials beaching in sensitive ecosystems like coral reefs. To mitigate potential pollution and seabed erosion impacts various land-based FAD retrieval programs (FRPs) have been set up in recent years in specific sensitive areas. These programs collect FADs just before they reach the coast or if they have already stranded, they will extract as much material as possible to dispose of it on land. To implement such programs personnel and infrastructures are required and funds needed to enable maximum recovery of lost and abandoned FAD structures. In this document we try to understand the requirements and costs involved to set up FRPs in coastal locations. Different formulas exist for recuperating FADs arriving (i.e., dedicated retrieval vessels, cooperation with*

artisanal fisheries). We present the results of a survey on FRP costs and discuss the benefits of different FAD collection approaches."

53. The WGFAD **REQUESTED** that interested CPCs work within the context of the WPEB to review the voluntary data collection form for ALDFG recovery, proposed by the Secretariat. The WGFAD **RECOMMENDED** that this review should include:

    (v) information related to the loss of fishing gear;
    (vi) information that would allow the quantitative assessment of the impacts of DFADs and other ALDFG fishing gear in sensitive areas and on entangled individuals (e.g. quantity, fate);
    (vii) a complementary study alongside FAD recovery programmes that takes into account the potential actions of local actors and considers the inclusion of recovery vessel category, in order to achieve common ecological goals within a broad fishing gear recovery programme; and
    (viii) provide photographic evidence of recovery of stranded gears if possible.

54. The WGFAD **NOTED** the costs associated with implementing FAD recovery programs, both in terms of time and budget. **NOTING** that such programs may not always be ecologically cost-effective. The involvement of additional stakeholders, such as local schools and community group, could be potentially beneficial in supporting recovery efforts.

55. WGFAD further **NOTED** that, during the Commission session held in April 2025, discussions took place regarding the possible introduction of a new supply vessel category "FAD retrieval vessels" dedicated to FAD recovery. This approach could enhance effectiveness and would include a review of potential impacts on marine habitats.

56. WGFAD **ACKNOWLEDGED** that Seychelles has undertaken FAD recovery missions, with results to be presented in a future WGFAD session.

57. The WGFAD **NOTED** the differences in the number of FADs recovered varies over time, largely due to variations in vessel operations. These variations are linked to the different fishing practices, operational areas, and patterns used by fleets across different oceans. **NOTING** that in the Indian Ocean, vessels tend to operate more uniformly, which contrasts with the more varied operations observed in other regions.

6. REVIEW OF ANY NEW INFORMATION AVAILABLE ON FADS (ALL)

58. The WGFAD **NOTED** paper IOTC2025-WGFAD07-08, which discussed reducing drifting Fish Aggregating Devices number and impacts through cooperation, with the following abstract provided by the authors:

    "*Drifting fish aggregating devices (FADs), equipped with echosounder buoys, are highly effective tools that significantly enhance tuna catchability for purse seine vessels. However, FADs are also responsible for various ecological impacts - some well established, others still debated within the scientific community. These ecological impacts highlight the need to develop strategies aimed at reducing FAD numbers. In this study, we explore the potential of buoy information sharing among vessels as a means to reduce FAD numbers while maintaining purse seine fleets profitability. By developing an Individual-Based Model, built upon a pelagic species behavioural model, we demonstrate that FAD numbers in the Indian Ocean could be reduced by 75 % through coordinated information sharing. This reduction not only improves vessel profitability by cutting private costs and increasing revenue, but also strongly decreases social costs, such as carbon emissions and FAD stranding. However, this approach also highlights trade-offs, as it leads to a*

slight increase in silky shark bycatch. Therefore, careful consideration will be required to balance these outcomes and guide future FAD management strategies"

59. The WGFAD **NOTED** the results of the paper which highlights the complexities and trade-offs involved in changing the way that fisher behaviour may change if increases in information sharing and decreases in DFADs are modelled.

60. The WGFAD **NOTED** that the results of the study suggested there was a potential for a four-time reduction in DFADs while still respecting the TAC that could result in increased profitability, a decrease in DFAD strandings, and a decrease in greenhouse gas emissions. The WGFAD **NOTED** that there were potential risks too: a greater reduction in DFADs (six-time reduction) would result in increased competition, and overall, an increase in information sharing was estimated to increase silky shark bycatch (based on observer data from purse seine nets directly, **not** entanglement estimates).

61. The WGFAD **NOTED** that information sharing currently does occur in within the DFAD purse seine fleets, and this was accounted for in the study. The model also includes slightly fewer purse seine vessels than currently exist (40 in the model vs. 48 currently fishing), however the trends are reflective of the current situation.

62. The WGFAD also **DISCUSSED** the potential for including more industry feedback into the results to ground truth the potential of future scenarios and improve acceptability of any recommendations from the study.

63. The WGFAD **NOTED** paper IOTC2025-WGFAD07-09, which reviewed whether bycatch has been under-estimated in purse seine fisheries through the use of DFADs, with the following abstract provided by the authors:

"*The incidental capture of non-target or bycatch species in fisheries is seen as a key factor in the decline of several marine megafauna populations worldwide. In pelagic fisheries targeting highly migratory species like tuna, bycatch is one of the main impacts that these fisheries have on the broader ocean ecosystem. The IOTC defines bycatch as any non-target species "which are (a) retained (byproduct), (b) incidentally taken in a fishery and returned to the sea (discarded); or (c) incidentally affected by interacting with fishing equipment in the fishery, but not taken." By removing non-target species from the environment, the fishery has the potential to disrupt predator-prey balances which can contribute to reduced productivity in the ecosystem and have knock-on effects on the fishery itself. Extensive cascading effects on lower trophic levels is another important consideration. Thus, bycatch in fisheries represents great ecological concern*."

64. The WGFAD **DISCUSSED** the potential for discrepancies between shark catches reported in DFADs and what could potentially be caught in DFADs (but not reported). The WGFAD **NOTED** that both the data and methods in the presentation were from 10+ years ago, and that the work from Filmalter et al. (2013) was based on different DFADs that had a design that is no longer permitted in the IOTC fisheries.

65. The WGFAD **DISCUSSED** the DFAD current design compared to that in use when the Filmalter et al. (2013) study was completed, and outlined that all purse seine vessels have observers onboard (100 %) coverage, and NOTED that data do not suggest that DFADs still use a net below the DFAD that was considered to be "entangling".

66. The WGFAD **DISCUSSED** the potential that there may be DFADs in use that still use entangling features, and the definition of "entangling" (whether this relates to materials on current DFADs that may degrade/fall into the water with the potential to cause "entanglements"). The WGFAD

DISCUSSED the potential for studies to laboratory test the tensile strength of components of current DFADs to understand their "entangling" potential.

67. The WGFAD **DISCUSSED** and **AGREED** that echosounder buoy data were not suitable currently to understand species composition at or around DFADs, as published studies have shown estimates of bycatch were poorly aligned with that of the observer data, even when just using presence/absence data.

68. The WGFAD **NOTED** that underwater visual survey should be used to understand entanglement on DFADs or observer data, not looking at stranded DFADs for entanglement data.

69. The WGFAD **REQUESTED** that data on the presence of netting on DFADs thought to have been active after the implementation of **RESOLUTION 19/02** be made available to the WGFAD. It was **NOTED** by the WGFAD that the authors estimated that netting was found under 33% of DFADs that were inspected in their research studies, however the WGFAD **REQUESTED** evidence for this be shared with the group for verification.

70. The WGFAD **ENCOURAGED** CPCs to use new estimates of DFAD use together with all information that can be collected on FAD designs, observer data on DFAD entanglement, underwater DFAD observation, and other information such as tagging data to produce new, improved estimates of bycatch/entanglements in PS DFAD fisheries.

7. WRAP UP, SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Election of Chair of the WGFAD for the next biennium

71. The WGFAD **NOTED** that the second term of the current co-Chair, Dr. Gorka Merino (AZTI), and the first term of the current co-Chair, Mr. Avelino Munwane, expired at the close of the WGFAD07 meeting. In accordance with the IOTC Rules of Procedure (2014), participants are required to elect new Chairpersons of the WGFAD for the next biennium. The WGFAD expressed its gratitude to the Chairs for their dedicated leadership, noting that numerous important issues were resolved and significant progress was made during their tenure. The WGFAD also **NOTED** that, for personal reasons, Mr. Avelino Munwane was not able to be considered for a second term.

72. In line with the Rules of Procedure (2014), the WGFAD **CALLED** for nominations for the Chairperson(s) of the IOTC WGFAD for the next biennium but received no new nominations to replace the current Chairs. Dr. Gorka Merino was nominated and elected as Chairperson of the WGFAD for the next biennium. The WGFAD **RECALLED** that in 2023, the Commission endorsed a recommendation by the SC to allow Chairs to serve an additional year or years beyond two terms if no suitable candidates are available to replace them once their terms are completed.

73. The WGFAD further **AGREED** that the option for appointing another co-Chair will remain open for the next meeting if a suitable candidate becomes available.

8. REMARKS AND CLOSING OF THE 7TH SESSION OF THE WORKING GROUP ON FADS

74. The report of the 7th Session of the Working Group on FADs (IOTC–2025–WGFAD07–R) was **ADOPTED** by correspondence.

APPENDIX I
LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Chairpersons					
Title	**First name**	**Last name**	**Affiliation**	**Contracting Parties & Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties (CPC)**	**E-mail**
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Title	**First name**	**Last name**	**Affiliation**	**Contracting Parties & Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties (CPC)**	**E-mail**
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APPENDIX II
AGENDA FOR THE 7TH WORKING GROUP ON FADS

Date: 9 - 10 June 2025
Location: Zoom
Venue: Virtual
Time: 12:00 – 16:00 (Seychelles time)

Co-Chair: Dr. Gorka Merino (European Union); **Co-Chair:** Mr. Avelino Munwane (Mozambique)

1. **OPENING OF THE MEETING** (Co-Chairs)
2. **ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE SESSION** (Co-Chairs)
3. **THE IOTC PROCESS: OUTCOMES, UPDATES, AND PROGRESS**
4. **REVIEW OF ANY ADDITIONAL DATA AVAILABLE AT THE SECRETARIAT ON FADS** (IOTC Secretariat)
5. **COMMISSION REQUESTS TO THE SC ON FADS (All)**
   - 5.1. Resolution 24/02 On Management of Drifting Fish Aggregating Devices (DFADs) in the IOTC Area of Competence
   - 5.2. Resolution 23/01 on the management of anchored fish aggregating devices (AFADs)
6. **REVIEW OF ANY NEW INFORMATION AVAILABLE ON FADS**
7. **WRAP UP, SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS** (Co-Chairs & IOTC Secretariat)
   - 7.1. Election of Chair of the WGFAD for the next biennium (IOTC Secretariat)
8. **REMARKS AND CLOSING OF THE 7th SESSION OF THE AD-HOC WORKING GROUP ON FADs** (Co-Chairs)

APPENDIX III
LIST OF DOCUMENTS

Document	Title
IOTC-2025-WGFAD07-01a	Draft: Agenda of the 7th Working Group on FADs Meeting
IOTC-2025-WGFAD07-01b	Draft: Annotated agenda of the 7th Working Group on FADs Meeting
IOTC-2025-WGFAD07-02	Draft: List of documents of the 7th Working Group on FADs Meeting
IOTC-2025-WGFAD07-03	Outcomes of the 27th Session of the Scientific Committee (IOTC Secretariat)
IOTC-2025-WGFAD07-04	Outcomes of the 29th Session of the Commission (IOTC Secretariat)
IOTC-2025-WGFAD07-05	Overview of Data and Information Held by the Secretariat on Purse Seine Fisheries Using Drifting Fish Aggregating Devices in the IOTC Area of Competence (IOTC Secretariat)
IOTC-2025-WGFAD07-06	Drifting Towards Inequity: Redesigning dFAD Governance for Transboundary Ecological Justice (Heile A, Bailey M)
IOTC-2025-WGFAD07-07	Recommendations for anchored FAD data and management (Pearce J et al)
IOTC-2025-WGFAD07-08	Reducing drifting Fish Aggregating Devices number and impacts through cooperation (Dupaix A, Guillotreau P, Deneubourg J, Capello M, Laurent D)
IOTC-2025-WGFAD07-09	Is bycatch under-represented in purse seine fisheries through the use of dFADs? (Dyer E, Perraudeau M, Purves M)
IOTC-2025-WGFAD07-10	Proposed form for the collection of data on Abandoned, Lost and Discarded Fishing Gear (ALDFG) (IOTC Secretariat)
IOTC-2025-WGFAD07-11	Data Collection for Assessing Impacts of FAD Stranding Events (Uyarra M, Zudaire I, Salgado A, Grande M, Murua J, Erauskin E, Bullock R, Grimmel H, Santiago J)
IOTC-2025-WGFAD07-12	Evaluating needs for the set up and maintenance of land-based FAD retrieval programs (Murua J, Andrés M, Zudaire I, Grande M, Uyara M, Salgado A, Pollock K, Santiago J)

APPENDIX IV

SUMMARY OF COMPLIANCE WITH AND COLLECTION OF THE DRIFTING FAD MANAGEMENT PLANS

Summary of compliance with and collection of the drifting fish aggregating devices management plans
Provide comprehensive review of the DFAD management plan

Annex II Sections		CPC								
		EU-Spain	EU-France	EU-Italy	Kenya	Korea	Mauritius	Seychelles	Oman	Tanzania
Objective		Y	Y		Did not submit	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Scope		Y	Y			Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Description of its application with respect to			Y							
	vessel-types and support and tender vessels	Y	Y			Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	DFAD numbers and DFADs beacon numbers to be deployed	Y	Y			Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	reporting procedures for DFAD deployment	Y	Y			Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	incidental bycatch reduction and utilisation policy	N	Y			Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	consideration of interaction with other gear types		Y			N/A	Y	Y	Y	Y
	plans for monitoring and retrieval of lost DFADs	Y	Y			Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	statement or policy on "DFAD ownership"		Y			Y	Y	Y	Y	
Institutional arrangements for management of the DFAD Management Plans			Y							
	institutional responsibilities	Y	Y			Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	application processes for DFAD and /or DFAD beacons deployment approval	Y	Y			Y	Y	Y	Y	
	obligations of vessel owners and masters in respect of DFAD and /or DFAD beacons deployment and use		Y			Y	Y	Y	Y	
	DFAD and/or DFADs beacons replacement policy	N	Y			Y	Y		Y	N
	reporting obligations	Y*	Y			Y	Y		Y	Y
DFAD construction specifications and requirements										
	DFAD design characteristics (a description)	Y*	Y			Y*	Y	Y*	Y	Y*
	DFAD markings and identifiers, including DFADs beacons		Y			Y	Y	Y	Y	N
	lighting requirements	Y	Y			Y	Y	Y	Y	N
	radar reflectors	Y	Y			Y	Y	Y	Y	N
	visible distance	Y	Y			Y	Y	Y	Y	N
	radio buoys (requirement for serial numbers)	Y	Y			Y		Y	Y	N
	satellite transceivers (requirement for serial numbers)	Y	Y			Y	Y	Y	Y	N
	sonars (make and technical specifications)	Y	Y			Y	Y	Y	Y	N
Applicable areas										
	Details of any closed areas or periods e.g. territorial waters, shipping lanes, proximity to artisanal fisheries, etc.	Y	Y			Y	Y	Y	Y	N
Applicable period for the DFAD–MP.		Y	Y			Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Means for monitoring and reviewing implementation of the DFAD–MP.		Y	Y			Y	Y	Y	Y	N
DFAD logbook template (data to be collected specified in Annex I		Y	Y			Y	Y	Y	Y	N
Data submission		YES	YES	YES		YES	YES	YES	NO	NO
Vessel information		YES	YES	YES			YES	YES		
Date		YES	YES	YES			YES	YES		
Location of the floating object		YES	YES	YES	No data submitted		YES	YES		
Location of the vessel if different		YES	YES	YES			YES	YES		
Floating object		YES	YES	YES			YES	YES		
Emerged part		YES	No indication given	No indication given			YES	YES		
Submerged part			No indication given	No indication given		Using old version which excluded IDs and more detailed information		Indicating if plastic/metal, length, width, height		
Classification of Floating Objects		YES	YES	YES			YES	YES		
classification of activities with floating object		YES	YES	YES			YES	YES		
Classification of activities with instrumented buoys		YES	YES	YES			YES	YES		
classification of outcome of DFADs deployed										
Effort										
Catches		Yes	Yes	Yes		No	Yes	Yes		

APPENDIX V

SUMMARY OF COMPLIANCE WITH AND COLLECTION OF THE ANCHORED FAD MANAGEMENT PLANS

Summary of compliance with and collection of the anchored fish aggregating devices management plans
Provide comprehensive review of the AFAD management plan

Annex I guidelines for management plan sections		CPC					
		EU-MYT	EU-REU	IDN	MDV	MUS	Comments
Objective		N	Y	Y	Y	Y	
Scope		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
Description of its application with respect to:	Vessel types	N	Y	Y		Y	
	AFAD numbers and/or AFAD beacon numbers to be deployed (per AFAD type)	N	Y	Y	Y*	Y	* No fully described, but providing some information
	reporting and/or recording procedures for AFAD deployments	N	Y	Y	Y*	Y	
	plans for monitoring and retrieval of lost AFADs	N	Y	Y	Y*	Y	
	statement or policy on "AFAD ownership"	N	Y	Y		Y	
Institutional arrangements for management of the AFAD Management Plans	institutional responsibilities	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	
	regulations applicable to the setting and use of AFADs	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	
	At-sea AFAD repairs, maintenance rules and replacement policy	N	Y	Y	Y*	Y	
	data collection system	N	Y	Y		Y	
	reporting obligations	N	Y	Y		Y	
AFAD construction specifications and requirements	AFAD design characteristics (a description)	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	
	AFAD markings and identifiers, including AFAD beacons, if any	Y	Y	Y	Y*	Y	
	radar reflectors, if any	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	
	radio buoys, if any (requirement for serial numbers)	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	
	satellite transceivers, if any (requirement for serial numbers)	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	
	echo sounder, if any	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	
Applicable areas	details of any closed areas e.g., shipping lanes, Marine Protected Areas, reserves etc	N	Y	Y*	Y	Y	
Means for monitoring and reviewing implementation of the AFAD–MP.		N	Y	Y		Y	
Methodologies for recording and reporting data specified in Annex II				Y	Y	Y	No described a methology , just refering to the Anex II of Res. 23/01
	Any fishing activity around an AFAD including catch and bycatch, whether retained or discarded dead or alive.	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	
	Position for each fishing activity	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	
	Date	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	
	AFAD identifier		Y	Y	Y	Y	
General		EU-MYT did not submit AFAD management plan for 2025, document on position of the FAD and regulation provided for 2024	Resolution 23/01 implemented and transposed to the Management plan of artisanal fisheries				
Data submission		N	N	N	Y	N	
Month		x	x	x	Y	x	
day of month		x	x	x	Y	x	
fishery		x	x	x	Y	x	
latitude		x	x	x	Y	x	
longitud		x	x	x	Y	x	
aFOB							
identifier		x	x	x	N	x	
Type		x	x	x	Y	x	
Activity		x	x	x	Y	x	
Catches by							
species		x	x	x	Y	x	
type of fate		x	x	x	Y	x	
raising		x	x	x	Y	x	

APPENDIX VI
CONSOLIDATED RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE 7TH SESSION OF THE WORKING GROUP ON FADS

WGFAD07.01 (para 28) **NOTING** that the majority of FADs are mostly found submerged underwater meaning that reading their unique FAD identifier can be challenging, the WGFAD **RECOMMENDED** that the SC consider the following while developing a marking scheme: 1) including redundancy or checkbits in DFAD (and buoy) identifiers to allow errors to be identified; 2) embedding QR codes and Radio Frequency Identifiers (RFIDs) in buoys and potentially DFADs so that they can be easily scanned to avoid errors with manual input of the identifiers; 3) create standards for including the ID marking on DFADs, focusing on putting them as close to the surface as possible to facilitate reading their ID; and 4) assess the feasibility of marking bio-FADs.

WGFAD07.02 (para 53) The WGFAD **REQUESTED** that interested CPCs work within the context of the WPEB to review the voluntary data collection form for ALDFG recovery, proposed by the Secretariat. The WGFAD **RECOMMENDED** that this review should include:

(i) information related to the loss of fishing gear;
(ii) information that would allow the quantitative assessment of the impacts of DFADs and other ALDFG fishing gear in sensitive areas and on entangled individuals (e.g. quantity, fate);
(iii) a complementary study alongside FAD recovery programmes that takes into account the potential actions of local actors and considers the inclusion of recovery vessel category, in order to achieve common ecological goals within a broad fishing gear recovery programme; and
(iv) provide photographic evidence of recovery of stranded gears if possible.