Consideration of Exceptional Circumstances for the skipjack tuna Management Procedure adopted by the IOTC in 2023

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Abstract

The IOTC adopted a Management Procedure for skipjack tuna during its Annual Meeting in 2024. This MP is used for the first time in 2025 to set catch limits for this important stock for the period 2027-2029. The application of the MP in 2025 is described in document IOTC-2025-WPM16-12 and this document reviews recent data to help the IOTC's Scientific Committee evaluate if the implementation of the TAC for the period 2027-2029 may pose the sustainability of skipjack at risk.

Introduction

In 2024, the IOTC adopted a Management Procedure (MP) for the management of Indian Ocean skipjack (Resolution 24-07). This Resolution establishes that the Scientific Committee (SC) shall run the MP and advise the Commission of the outcome, including recommended TAC and any advice on exceptional circumstances in accordance with the guidelines for the provisions of Exceptional Circumstances developed by the SC (Appendix 6a of IOTC-2021-SC24-R).

The recommended TAC for the period 2027-2029, as described in document IOTC-2025-WPM-16-12, is 565,745 tons. In this document, we review recent catch and CPUE data to help identify potential Exceptional Circumstances. as other information regarding biology, population dynamics, and fisheries has not been presented this year.

Indicators of Exceptional Circumstances

Catch data

Since the adoption of the interim Harvest Control Rule (HCR) (Resolution 16-02) until the recently adopted MP (Resolution 24-07), the SC has recommended catch limits for skipjack for the periods (2018-2020, 2021-2023 and 2024-2026.

The recommended TAC for the period 2027-2029 as per the newly adopted MP (Resolution 23/04) is 565,745 tons. We do not have the 2027 catch data to compare against the TAC set for 2027 and, therefore, there is no exceptional circumstance.

However, the catch of Indian Ocean has exceeded the recommended TAC by 26.2% on average since 2018 (Figures 1 and 2). The catch in 2024 was of 764,521 tons, which represents a record high for Indian Ocean skipjack and exceeds the recommended TAC (628,606 tons) by 21.6%. Moreover, the reported catch for 2024 is higher than the TAC established for 2027, and catches will need to be constrained to adopted TAC, or exceptional circumstances will be triggered.

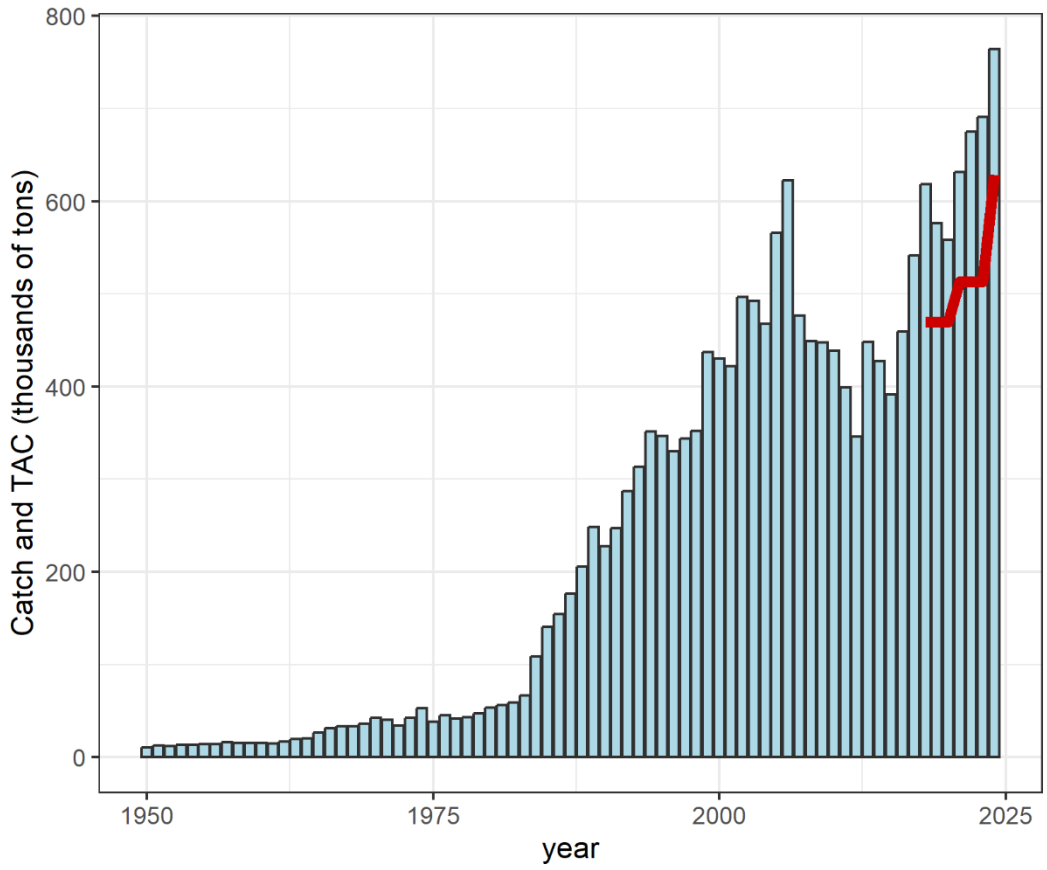

Figure 1: Reported and estimated catch as per IOTC database (IOTC-2025-WPTT27-DATA02), (blue bars) and TAC for the periods 2018-2020, 2021-2023 and 2024-2026 (red line).

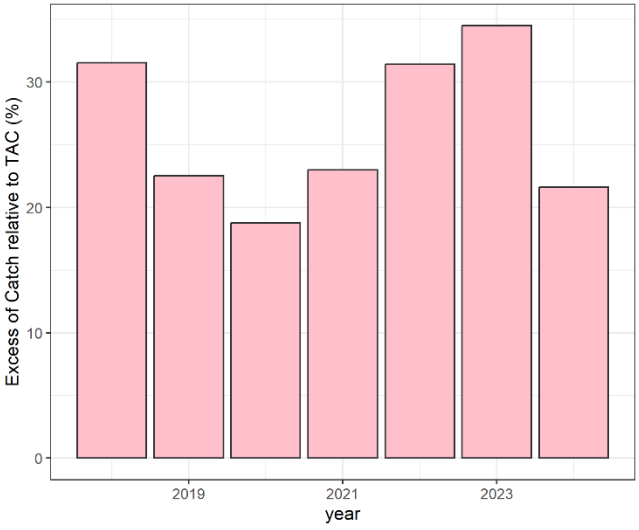

Figure 2: Estimated excess % (catch – TAC)/TAC for Indian Ocean skipjack for the period 2018-2024 as per IOTC database (IOTC-2025-WPTT27-DATA02).*CPUE data*

The recent trends in CPUEs for the EU purse seine using DFADs (Kaplan et al., 2025) and the Maldivian Pole and Line index (Medley et al., 2025) show comparable trends. In both cases, the CPUEs show increasing trends since 2012 (for PS) and 2016 (for PL).

The development of the series provided at WPTT(DP) does match the CPUE specification for the MP and, therefore, it is not considered that there are exceptional circumstances related to the CPUE.

Discussion

This paper aims to help the SC discuss the potential existence of Exceptional Circumstances, which evaluate if the adopted MP is operating as expected. Overall, there continues to be an excess of catch relative to the recommended limits. However, the abundance indicators don't seem to suggest a potential decline of the stock.

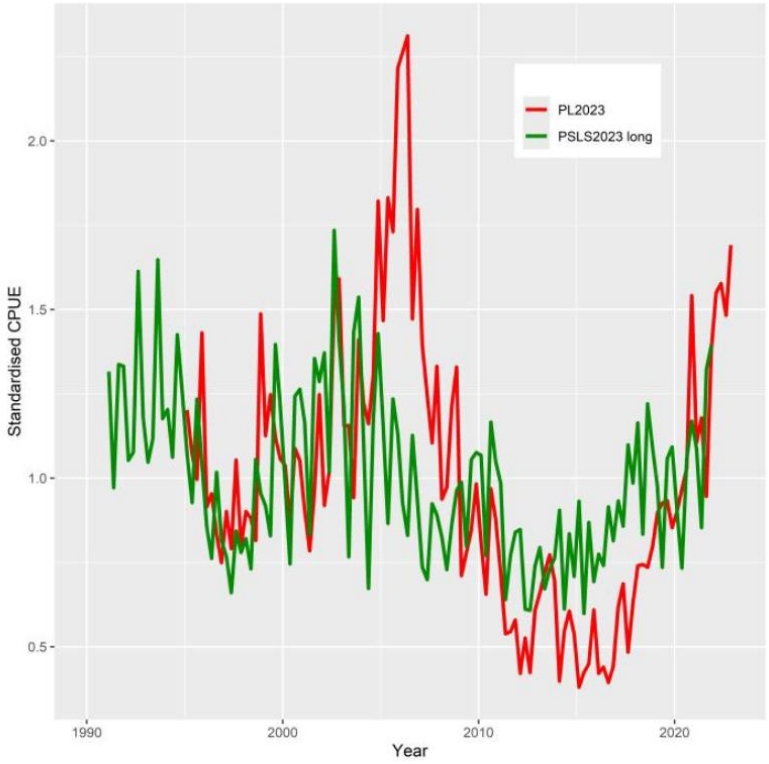

Figure 3: Data inputs to the skipjack MP: EU purse seine index 1990 – 2023 (Kaplan et al. 2025) and Maldives Pole and Line index 1995 – 2024 (Medley et al. 2025) (from IOTC-2025-WPM-16-12).