

Options Paper # 1 - Artisanal Fisheries and Allocation

**TCAC16, 3 - 6 February 2026
Perth Australia**

Background

TCAC15 tasked the chair to prepare four papers for TCAC16:

1. Options to address artisanal fisheries within the allocation framework.
2. Options for the allocation criteria to address the special requirements of developing States, including the various components that could be included.
3. Options on the different baselines that could be included in the allocation framework
4. Options for assessing and addressing compliance with quota, including guidance on how this is addressed in other RFMOs, and previous discussions held at TCAC.

As advised in TCAC16-03, the chair circulated a draft agenda and recommended deferral of compliance discussion to ensure sufficient time to resolve key discussions on artisanal fisheries, catch attribution and criteria weightings. Options paper #4 will therefore be deferred to TCAC17. Due to overlaps between options #2 and #3, the chair has merged these two requests into one paper that can discuss them together.

Introduction

TCAC15 instructed the chair to prepare a paper on options to address artisanal/small-scale fisheries within an allocation framework. This is connected to the discussion at TCAC15 on the inclusion of EEZs in the IOTC allocation framework. The IOTC Agreement and previous resolutions very clearly include EEZs in the mandate of the IOTC, reflecting the migratory characteristics of the tuna fisheries. But some CPs have repeatedly expressed concerns about the treatment of artisanal/small-scale fisheries.

Partly in order to address these concerns, TCAC previously agreed at TCAC13 to exclude neritic tunas from the initial scope of TCAC negotiations and first focus on five oceanic fisheries that are clearly migratory and urgently require whole-of-IOTC management: yellowfin, bigeye, skipjack, albacore and swordfish. As a result, the first allocation resolution will exempt neritic tunas, which therefore substantially excludes many artisanal and small-scale fisheries.

Over the past three months, the chair undertook extensive consultations with a diverse selection of IOTC CPs, invited experts and the Food and Agriculture Organisation. These

consultations included developing coastal States with significant artisanal fisheries, as well as developed coastal and distant water fishing States. While not all CPs engaged in these consultations, it is helpful to note that all consulted CPs expressed general support for the special treatment of artisanal fisheries if the TCAC could agree on a mechanism for classifying these fisheries into appropriate categories. Most CPs oppose a broad exemption for artisanal/small scale fisheries without a workable definition.

The IOTC has not yet adopted a workable definition of artisanal/small-scale fisheries and relies on a stop-gap definition for reporting purposes that includes all fisheries inside an EEZ by vessels less than 24m. This is not an official definition but is used as a working definition for reporting purposes, including the IOTC Record of Authorised Vessels. It is noteworthy that IOTC Resolution 23/03 only exempts vessels below 12m, not indicating whether they are artisanal or small-scale.

Given that many industrial fishing vessels are smaller than 24m, this means that the IOTC is unable to accurately report catches by artisanal/small-scale fisheries, diluting the importance of critical community and livelihood fisheries that are lost within a combined bucket with industrial fleets up to 23.9m. It also means that the IOTC is unable to customise necessary conservation and management resolutions to avoid any adverse impacts on artisanal livelihood fisheries. The combined fishing mortality of artisanal/small-scale, and all industrial vessels less than 24m inside an EEZ is substantial and inherently requires conservation and management. However, without any differentiation, it is impossible to protect artisanal and coastal fishing communities from adverse impacts, while also ensuring the long-term sustainability of their fisheries.

IOTC has previously tried to agree on a definition. In 2022, the 18th meeting of the Working Party on Data Collection and Statistics (WPDCS) considered a proposal from the secretariat to differentiate fishing operations into 7 categories: recreational, subsistence, small-scale, semi-industrial, semi-industrial (high seas), industrial, and exploratory (IOTC, 2022). However, no agreement was reached and the proposal was not adopted.

Rather than try again to negotiate an agreed definition, this paper proposes an alternative path where CPs will self-identify their artisanal/small-scale fisheries within agreed characterisations that provides an agreed framework of three categories. Special consideration would then be given to these three categories of artisanal/small scale fisheries, delaying their inclusion into the allocation quota for an agreed period of years; thereby providing time for capacity building, monitoring, reporting and management systems to be established. This would ensure that these artisanal and community livelihood fisheries are treated appropriately, and governments have sufficient time to implement necessary systems, supported by regional and global development grants.

In order to protect the interests of these fisheries, and recognise their special requirements, all catch history, whether estimated or recorded, would continue to be included in allocation formula as currently proposed and estimated/recorded. This would ensure their equitable treatment and avoid any inadvertent disproportionate burden on these fisheries. Subsequent catch limits derived from allocation quotas would not bind artisanal/small-scale fisheries during the implementation period, but, coastal States would be expected to ensure that this portion of the CP quota is set aside for these artisanal and small scale fisheries.

Classifying Artisanal and Small-Scale Fisheries for Special Consideration

Following widespread consultations, the paper proposes a draft framework that would guide self-identification and reporting by CPs. This is partly based on the FAO Hidden Harvest project that have developed a very useful characterisation matrix for these fisheries¹ as well as advice received during the consultations.

The paper proposes three categories that would each receive a stepped level of special consideration in the allocation framework while necessary domestic and regional systems were established.

If this framework is approved, coastal CPs then would provide a report to TCAC17 on their artisanal/small scale fishing fleets that generally shared the broad characteristics within each category. These fleets would then be exempt from the application of limits determined by the allocation framework, conditional on the coastal State implementing the agreed monitoring, reporting and management responsibilities. This would then form the basis for a large grant proposal to fund this work.

Precedents exist in the WCPFC where large sequential GEF grants were repeatedly provided to build the capacity of Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam to monitor, report and manage highly diverse artisanal, small scale and semi-industrial fisheries that catch substantial amounts of oceanic tuna.

TCAC16 is invited to consider this option as a way forward and provide feedback on the proposed characterisations, attributes and special treatment.

¹ Aguon et al, 2025. Five archetypes of small-scale fisheries reveal a continuum of production strategies to guide governance and policymaking. *Nature Food*. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43016-025-01237-5>

Characterisation Framework for Classifying Artisanal and Small-Scale Fisheries for Special Consideration

Characterisations	Near Shore Artisanal Fisheries	Offshore Artisanal Fisheries	Semi-Industrial Fisheries
Operational Attributes			
Fishing Trip Duration	Day trip	Day trip	1 – 4 days
Fishing Location and Range	Within territorial sea / archipelagic waters	Within 50nm of shoreline	Within EEZ
Species	Primarily neritic tunas and other non-tuna, minor catch of oceanic tunas	Mix of oceanic and neritic tuna and other non-tuna species	Significant catches of oceanic tunas
Labour	Individual and/or family members	Cooperative/collective crews	Paid crew
Use of the Catch			
Utilisation of catch, value addition / preservation	For local consumption	For domestic consumption, may be chilled / locally processed / cured	For domestic consumption, may be chilled / locally processed / cured / frozen.
Capital			
Disposal of Catch	Household consumption / local sale	Local sale / sale to traders at landing	Sale to traders / processing
Ownership	Owner operator	Owner operator / leased	Owner hires crew / may not fish / corporate
Technological			
Size of Fishing Vessel	< 12 metres, < 10 GT	< 12 metres, < 10 GT	12 to < 24 metres, < 50 GT
Motorisation	Outboard / inboard engine <100hp	Outboard / inboard engine <100hp	Outboard / inboard engine <400hp
Storage	Open or ice	Ice	Ice or freezer
Special Treatment			
Exemption from Catch Limits determined by Allocation	Exempt from catch limits until reviewed	Exempt from catch limits for 3 - 5 years	Exempt from catch limits for 2 - 3 years
Implementation Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Monitoring and catch/effort estimation program implemented within 3 years. - Catch and effort estimation provided annually to secretariat. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Monitoring and reporting program implemented within 3 years. - Interim catch and effort estimation provided annually to secretariat. - Catch and/or effort management implemented within 3 – 5 years. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Monitoring and reporting program implemented within 2 - 3 years. - Logbook reporting implemented within 2 – 3 years. - MCS framework implemented within 2 – 3 years, including VMS and/or AIS - Catch and/or effort management implemented within 2 – 3 years.

