
**ON ESTABLISHING INTERIM CATCH LIMITS FOR YELLOWFIN TUNA IN THE IOTC
AREA OF COMPETENCE**
SUBMITTED BY: SOUTH AFRICA

Explanatory Memorandum

1. Background

The 2024 stock assessment for yellowfin tuna indicates that the stock is not overfished and is not subject to overfishing. Spawning biomass is estimated to be above SBMSY and fishing mortality below FMSY.

However, total reported catch in 2024 (490 622 t) exceeded the estimated MSY range (416 000 - 430 000 t) and the median MSY estimate of 421 000 t.

The Scientific Committee (SC) recommended that the Commission establish a Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for 2026–2028 that does not exceed the median recent MSY estimate (421 000 t). The SC further noted that maintaining catch levels above MSY increases the probability of stock depletion over the longer term.

While the stock remains above reference points, recent catch levels exceed sustainable benchmarks. In the absence of agreed limits, total catches may continue at levels inconsistent with scientific advice.

The SC also identified uncertainties relating to recruitment assumptions and CPUE standardisation. Although these uncertainties do not alter the overall stock status determination, they reinforce the need for precaution in establishing catch levels.

The establishment of interim catch limits consistent with MSY advice ensures that the Commission acts in accordance with scientific recommendations while further scientific work and discussions on allocation continue.

This interim measure does not constitute a long-term allocation of fishing opportunities and is without prejudice to any future allocation framework. It recognises the need to balance sustainability with the development aspirations and special requirements of developing coastal States and Small Island Developing States (SIDS). In recognition of the special requirements and circumstances of SIDS, the Comoros, Maldives, Mauritius and Seychelles will receive specific SIDS catch limits. In recognition of the developmental aspirations, limited historical participation, and structural constraints faced by certain developing coastal States, and in support of their equitable participation in the fishery, Kenya, Madagascar, Somalia, and the United Republic of Tanzania will receive specific developing State catch limits.

2. Basic Concepts

This Resolution shall apply for 2027, 2028 and 2029 as an interim measure. It is adopted pending the completion and review of the next yellowfin tuna stock assessment and the development, review, or adoption of a long-term allocation framework or other Commission decision concerning the allocation of fishing opportunities.

Nothing in this Resolution shall be interpreted as contingent upon the continuation of any specific subsidiary body or process. Should institutional arrangements relating to allocation discussions be modified, restructured, or concluded, this Resolution shall remain in force unless and until amended, replaced, or revoked by the Commission.

**RESOLUTION 26/XX
ON ESTABLISHING INTERIM CATCH LIMITS FOR YELLOWFIN TUNA IN THE IOTC AREA
OF COMPETENCE**

Keywords: yellowfin tuna, catch limits, total allowable catch

The Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC),

RECALLING the responsibility of IOTC for the conservation and optimum utilisation of yellowfin tuna in the IOTC area of competence;

RECOGNISING the need for action to ensure the achievement of IOTC objectives to conserve and manage yellowfin tuna in the IOTC area of competence;

MINDFUL of Article 56 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and Article XVI of the IOTC Agreement regarding the sovereign rights of coastal States for the purpose of exploring and exploiting, conserving and managing the living marine resources in their Exclusive Economic Zones;

MINDFUL of Articles 87 and 116 to 119 of UNCLOS regarding the right to fish on the high seas and the duty to cooperate in the conservation of high seas fish stocks;

COGNISANT of Article 64 of UNCLOS and the provisions of the UN Fish Stocks Agreement concerning cooperation in the conservation and management of highly migratory fish stocks;

RECOGNISING the special requirements of developing States, particularly Small Island Developing States under Article 24 of the UN Fish Stocks Agreement;

RECALLING that the 2024 stock assessment for yellowfin tuna indicates that the stock is not overfished and not subject to overfishing;

NOTING, however, that total catches of yellowfin tuna in 2024 exceeded the estimated maximum sustainable yield (MSY) and that sustained catches above MSY are projected to reduce spawning biomass over time;

RECOGNISING the recommendation of the IOTC Scientific Committee that the Commission establish a total allowable catch (TAC) for yellowfin tuna that does not exceed the median recent MSY estimate of approximately 421 000 t;

CONCERNED that maintaining recent catch levels could increase the probability of the stock returning to an overfished state in the long term;

ACKNOWLEDGING the uncertainties identified in the yellowfin tuna stock assessment, including recruitment assumptions and CPUE standardisation issues;

RECOGNISING the ongoing work of the Technical Committee on Allocation Criteria (TCAC) and the absence of a finalised allocation framework;

DESIRING to establish interim yellowfin tuna catch limits that ensure sustainability while preserving flexibility for future allocation decisions;

ADOPTS, in accordance with Article IX, paragraph 1 of the IOTC Agreement, the following:

Application

1. This Resolution shall apply to all CPCs within the IOTC area of competence.

Total allowable catch

2. The total allowable catch (TAC) for yellowfin tuna shall be 429 261 t in 2027, 2028, and 2029.
3. After 2029, the TAC specified in paragraph 2 shall remain in place unless the Commission adopts a different TAC. Once the Commission has adopted a management procedure for yellowfin tuna, the TAC for the following management periods will be adopted by the Commission in accordance with that management procedure.

Catch limits for yellowfin tuna and conditions associated with the catch limits

4. As an interim measure, CPCs are assigned to Categories A and B and shall apply the following catch limits, which take into account the special requirements of Small Island Developing States and the developmental aspirations, limited historical participation, and structural constraints faced by certain developing coastal States:

<i>CPC</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Catch limits (t)</i>
China	A	12 783
Comoros		6 000
European Union		70 533
India		29 089
Indonesia		41 819
Iran		38 200
Japan		3 703
Kenya		5 500
Korea		8 244
Maldives		43 333
Madagascar		4 500
Mauritius		9 850

Oman ¹		35 763
Pakistan		13 900
Seychelles		39 000
Somalia		5 000
Sri Lanka		32 045
Tanzania		5 500
Yemen		20 500
All other CPCs (sub-total)	B	4 000

5. In implementing the yellowfin tuna catch limits in paragraph 4 with respect to Category B CPCs, the following provisions shall apply:
- The sub-total for Category B CPCs shall not constitute a binding limit.
 - CPCs in Category B shall be subject to a trigger threshold of 2 000 t. If a CPC in Category B exceeds this threshold in two consecutive years from 2027, that CPC shall be listed as a Category C CPC in the table in paragraph 4 and receive a catch limit equal to the Category A CPC with the lowest catch limit, unless otherwise decided by the Commission.
 - CPCs in Category B shall not be subject to the provisions of this Resolution concerning overage, underage or transfer of catch.
6. If the Commission adopts, on the basis of a future management procedure or in its absence, a reduction or an increase of the TAC in accordance with paragraph 3, adjustments shall be applied to the catch limits of Category A CPCs in the table in paragraph 4, in proportion to the change in TAC. The sub-total for Category B CPCs shall remain unchanged.
7. This Resolution shall not prejudice the rights and obligations under international law of those developing coastal CPCs in the IOTC area of competence whose current fishing activity for yellowfin tuna is limited or non-existent, but that have a real interest in fishing for the species and may wish to develop their own yellowfin tuna fisheries.

Overage of catch

8. If any Category A CPC exceeds its annual catch limit, 100% of the overage of the catch limit shall be deducted from the respective CPC's catch limit during or before the adjustment year as indicated in the following table:

<i>Year of catch</i>	<i>Adjustment year</i>
2027	2029
2028	2030
2029	2031
...	...

¹ Considering Oman's unverified recent catch history, Oman shall apply a catch limit of 35 763 t, representing their average reported catch for the 15 year period from 2010 to 2024. Should the IOTC Secretariat be able to verify the higher reported catches by Oman, the Commission shall reconsider Oman's future catch limit at its next Commission meeting following this verification.

9. Notwithstanding paragraph 8, if any Category A CPC exceeds its annual catch limit for two consecutive years, this CPC's catch limit for the corresponding adjustment year shall be reduced by 125% of the excess catch, and the Commission may recommend additional measures, as appropriate.
10. In the case of overage of catch limits under Resolution 21/01 *on an Interim Plan for Rebuilding the Indian Ocean Yellowfin Tuna Stock in the IOTC Area of Competence* and Resolution 19/01 *On an Interim Plan for Rebuilding the Indian Ocean Yellowfin Tuna Stock in the IOTC Area of Competence*, 100% of the overage shall be deducted from the respective CPC's catch limit in 2027. If this Resolution enters into force for the respective CPC after 2027, the payback of the overage shall be implemented in the year following the entry into force of this Resolution for the respective CPC.

Underage of catch

11. Up to 15% of an underage of the annual catch limits established in paragraph 4 may be carried over to the corresponding adjustment year specified in paragraph 8.

Transfer of catch

12. By 31 December each year, a Category A CPC may temporarily transfer part or all of its annual catch limit for the following year to another Category A CPC that has not objected to this Resolution, by notification to the IOTC Secretariat.

Administration of catch limits by the IOTC Secretariat

13. The IOTC Secretariat shall annually prepare and circulate, by 31 December, a table of allocated catch limits disaggregated in accordance with the requirements set out in paragraphs 4 to 12 (including catch limits, overage and underage of catch, and transfers) for the following year.
14. If the IOTC Executive Secretary receives notifications of transfers in accordance with paragraph 12, it shall circulate these notifications and adjusted catch limits by 7 January each year.

Chartering agreements and export of fishing vessels

15. CPCs shall not conclude, extend or renew chartering agreements, be it as chartering or flag CPCs, with Contracting Parties that object to this Resolution.
16. CPCs shall not conclude, extend or renew chartering agreements with Contracting Parties that object to this Resolution.
17. Flag CPCs shall not export their authorised fishing or supply vessels to Contracting Parties that object to this Resolution.

Supply vessels

18. To ensure a level playing field among CPCs using supply vessels in their purse seine operations, Contracting Parties that have objected to Resolution 24/02 *on management of drifting fish aggregating devices (FADs) in the IOTC area of competence* shall gradually reduce supply vessels in purse seine operations targeting tropical tuna as follows:
- a) By 1 January 2027: 3 supply vessels in support of not less than 12 purse seine vessels, all of the same flag State.
 - b) By 1 January 2029: 3 supply vessels in support of not less than 15 purse seine vessels, all of the same flag State.
 - d) CPCs shall ensure that a single purse seine vessel shall not be supported by more than one supply vessel of the same flag State at any time.
 - e) CPCs shall not register any new or additional supply vessels on the IOTC Record of Authorised Vessels.

Scientific work

19. The IOTC Scientific Committee shall conduct a full stock assessment of yellowfin tuna in 2027.

Final provisions

20. Nothing in this Resolution shall pre-empt or prejudice the future allocation of fishing opportunities.
21. If one or more Contracting Parties object to this Resolution pursuant to Article IX, paragraph 5 of the IOTC Agreement, and if the sum of catches of the objecting Contracting Parties is equal to or above 20% of the TAC specified in paragraph 2, this Resolution shall be applicable only in 2027, and the Commission shall review this Resolution at its annual Session in 2027.
22. If the total catch in any year exceeds the applicable annual TAC, adjusted by the carryover of underage of catch, if any, for reasons other than exceeding of catch limits by CPCs with an allocated catch limit, the Commission shall review this Resolution.
23. The Commission shall review this Resolution in light of the next yellowfin tuna stock assessment and revise it as necessary at its annual Session in 2028.
24. This Resolution supersedes Resolution 21/01 *on an Interim Plan for Rebuilding the Indian Ocean Yellowfin Tuna Stock in the IOTC Area of Competence*. If the mechanism in paragraph 21 is triggered, Resolution 21/01 or, for those Contracting Parties that have objected to Resolution 21/01, the previous yellowfin rebuilding plans to which they are bound shall remain in force and apply from 2028 onwards.