
PROGRESS OF THE INDIAN OCEAN BLUE SHARK MANAGEMENT STRATEGY EVALUATION

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PURPOSE

To inform participants at the 10th Technical Committee on Management Procedure (TCMP10) of the progress of the Indian ocean blue shark management strategy evaluation.

BACKGROUND

IOTC Resolution 15/10 requested the IOTC Scientific Committee to develop and assess, through the management strategy evaluation (MSE) process, the performance of Management Procedures (MPs) and Harvest Control Rules (HCRs) to achieve Target Reference Points (TRPs) on average and avoid the Limit Reference Points (LRPs) with a high probability, taking into account the levels of uncertainty in the stock assessments for priority species. In recent years, substantial progress has been made in MSE initiatives for key commercial species such as tuna and billfish. These efforts have led to the successful adoption of MPs for species like skipjack tuna, bigeye tuna, and swordfish. Despite these advancements, similar processes have yet to be applied to pelagic sharks, primarily due to their status as bycatch species and the challenges associated with limited data availability

Among pelagic sharks, the blue shark is the most frequently caught species in the Indian Ocean. It is commonly captured as bycatch but also supports targeted fisheries for several fleets. Notably, compared to other pelagic sharks, data availability for the blue shark is more comprehensive, and there is a longer history of reported catches. This data sufficiency allows for the application of an integrated stock assessment model, such as Stock Synthesis, which has been performed by the Working Party on Ecosystem and bycatch since 2018. Recognizing the need for structured management for blue shark, the Commission, during its 28th session, mandated the SC to initiate the MSE for this species. The introduction of the MSE for blue shark has been incorporated into the SC's program of work and formalised via Resolution 25/8 *On the conservation of sharks caught in association with fisheries managed by IOTC*.

In response to the Commission's request, the MSE for blue shark was initiated in the second half of 2025 with a preliminary scoping study conducted by Charles Edwards, an IOTC consultant. The study aimed to identify appropriate methodologies and options for the MSE of Indian Ocean blue shark, including the development of a robust operating model informed by recent assessments and the preparation of a framework for comprehensive MSE development and ongoing management strategy implementation. The findings were presented at the WPM meeting in October 2025, where detailed feedback was received. Initial results indicate that both Total Allowable Catch (TAC)-based and length-based Management Procedures should be evaluated. Even though discard rates can be high, a TAC was considered necessary because of the status of blue shark as a target species for some fleets. The scoping study is designed to establish the foundation for a full MSE, which is expected to begin in the second half of 2026. The SC has endorsed the proposed plan of work for the blue shark MSE.

DISCUSSION

A detailed report of the result of the preliminary scoping study for the Indian Ocean blue shark MSE was provided in IOTC-2026-TCMP10-INF04, including the evaluation of the feasibility of different types of MP which may be applicable to the blue sharks.

RECOMMENDATION/S

That the TCMP:

- 1) **NOTE** paper IOTC-2026-TCMP10-05, which outlined the progress of the Indian Ocean blue shark tuna management strategy evaluation, and AGREE to consider how best to advise on the next step of the blue shark MSE work.