Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC)
Annual Meeting, May 11–15, 2026

This Position Statement outlines issues that we urge the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) to act on at its upcoming meeting.

COMPLIANCE PROCESSES

2026 Asks

- Fully implement the revised IOTC compliance assessment process adopted in 2023 to ensure robust and transparent assessment of Contracting Parties and Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties (CPC) accountability, particularly for CPC non-compliance with the provision of mandatory fishery and FAD data, catch and FAD limits and use of large-scale gillnets.
- Ensure all CPCs provide a detailed plan of action to address non-compliance — when they are assessed as non-compliant category 2 — within the three-month period following the Compliance Committee.

Background

A strong compliance process improves fisheries management by ensuring robust and transparent assessment of RFMO member accountability. IOTC Compliance Committee reports show significant CPC non-compliance with IOTC measures, in particular mandatory fishery and FAD data, catch and FAD limits and use of large-scale gillnets, which reduces their effectiveness. ISSF and Pew Charitable Trusts have recommendations to improve RFMO compliance processes in workshop reports: 2020 report, 2021 report, 2022 report. This includes action plans to address identified non-compliance, developing a scheme of responses to CPC non-compliance, and prioritizing the most serious infractions.

Priorities to Progress

- Further elaborate specific actions to be recommended by the Compliance Committee to the Commission to address serious CPC non-compliance.

RFMO Compliance Information & Resources

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TUNA STOCK CONSERVATION

2026 Asks

- Adopt a TAC for yellowfin tuna for the period of 2026-2028 that does not exceed the median MSY estimate of 421,000 tonnes, and adopt measures to ensure this TAC is not exceeded, as recommended by the IOTC Scientific Committee.
- Implement effective measures to ensure that skipjack and bigeye tuna catches do not exceed the catch limits established by the Harvest Control Rule for skipjack and the Management Procedure for bigeye.

Background

No new full yellowfin stock assessment was conducted by the IOTC Science Committee (SC) in 2025. However, the uncertainties identified in 2024 relation to the CPUE standardization were addressed in 2025. The analyses conducted in 2025 to update CPUE and the yellowfin stock assessment corroborate the 2024 stock assessment result. The yellowfin stock is in the green with 89% probability of not being overfished (SSB/SSBmsy= 1.32); and not subject to overfishing (F/Fmsy =0.75). If catches are maintained within the estimated MSY range (416,000-430,000 tons) there is more than a 50% probability that the stock will remain above SBMSY through 2033. As a result, the SC recommended a TAC for the period 2026, 2027 and 2028 that does not exceed the median recent MSY estimate (421,000 t) as higher catches are predicted to lead the stock to an overfished state in the long term. The SC also noted the catch level in 2024 (489,742 t) and urged the Commission to ensure that the recommended TAC is not exceeded.

Skipjack catches in 2021-2023 exceeded the catch limit set by the HCR in Res. 16/02 by around 23% in 2021, 31% in 2022, and 34% in 2023, reaching a record-high 688,680 tons in 2023. The recent catch levels in 2021-2023 were higher than the new catch limit established by the HCR in Res. 21/03 (628 606t) for the period 2024-2026. In 2024, catch was within the recommended levels. In 2025, IOTC agreed on a TAC resulting from the skipjack Management Procedure (MP) that was allocated among CPCs. However, reaching agreement required provisions that, if fully utilized, risk catches that exceed the TAC, as in previous years.

A new bigeye stock assessment was carried out in 2025 showing that bigeye is overfished but not subject to overfishing. Res. 22/03 for a bigeye MP recommended a TAC of 80,583 tons per year for 2024-2025, and the 2024 catch (87,040 t) exceeded the 2024 TAC (80,583 t). In 2025, the bigeye MP was applied again and the Commission adopted a new TAC of 92,670 t per year for the period 2026-2028, which was allocated between CPCs. But catch limits were not applied across all fleets. If all CPCs maximize their fishing opportunities, it may not result in effective catch controls and undermine the operation of the MP.

Priorities to Progress

- Consolidate the existing separate tropical tuna management measures into one, new comprehensive Tropical Tuna Management measure.
- Ensure CPCs comply with the prohibition on large-scale driftnets on the high seas and accelerate implementation of Res. 17/07.

Tuna Conservation Information & Resources

EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES (HARVEST STRATEGIES)

2026 Ask

- Sufficiently fund and accelerate the adoption of robust management procedures for yellowfin tuna and albacore.

Background

IOTC adopted a management procedure for bigeye, skipjack, and swordfish, but progress is slow on management procedures for other species, especially albacore and yellowfin. For example, the albacore MP-MSE work was not completed by 2025. Similarly, IOTC funding for advancing yellowfin has not been secured. The IOTC needs to ensure funding for yellowfin and albacore MSE processes in 2026, and beyond, to accelerate the adoption of MPs for both species.

Priorities to Progress

- Develop permanent Limit and Target Reference Points for all tunas.
- Conduct management strategy evaluation (MSE) for blue shark.

FAD MANAGEMENT

2026 Asks

In line with ISSF's established approach to strengthening FAD management:

- Require vessels to report complete FAD position data and acoustic biomass records from echosounder buoys for scientific use with appropriate time-lags to protect confidentiality.

Background

In 2019-2023, FAD sets accounted for nearly 38% of tropical tuna catches (50% of skipjack, 21% of yellowfin, and 34% of bigeye) in the Indian Ocean. In 2024, IOTC adopted a comprehensive, forward-leaning FAD management resolution. Res. 24/02 sets out a number of progressive changes to IOTC's FAD management, as well as areas for ongoing work, such as the new dFAD Register that is operational and in a testing period. However, many of the provisions are related only to compliance. The IOTC scientific process would benefit from FAD position and acoustic biomass records.

Priorities to Progress

- Develop FAD recovery program/strategies and consider incentive-based policies, where practical.

FAD Management Information & Resources

BYCATCH MITIGATION & SHARK PROTECTIONS

2026 Asks

- Amend Res. 25/08 to require shark fins to be naturally attached for all landings without exceptions or alternatives.
- The SC established criteria for the conduct of experimental fishing trials to assess the effects of leader materials on the mortality of vulnerable shark species (per para 17 of Resolution 25/08), if such trials take place, ensure that they are done so only in accordance with the criteria.
- Adopt updated best practices for safe handling and release of mobulids and adopt best practices for safe handling and release for cetaceans, including use of safe release devices, as recommended by the SC.
- Amend Res. 23/07 on seabird mitigation measures to reflect up-to-date scientific advice and align the specifications to meet the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) standards.
- Amend Res. 12/04 on sea turtles to include scientifically proven mitigation measures and safe handling and release devices and require identification of sea turtles at species level as recommended by the SC.

Background

Some shark and sea turtle species are declining in abundance. The requirement of fins naturally attached in Res. 25/08 allows alternatives for landing frozen sharks. Res 25/08 includes provisions for experimental fishing trials to test the use of wire leaders north of 20S. WCPFC adopted best practices for safe handling and release of cetaceans, including the use of specific procedures and tools. The IOTC should also adopt such measures.

The SC noted that the level of compliance with Res. 23/07 and the frequency of use of each of the 4 seabird mitigation measures (because vessels can choose two out of three possible options) are still poorly known. And Res. 23/07 meets some but not all of ACAP specifications for these mitigation measures.

IOTC scientists advise that there is considerable risk to marine turtles in the Indian Ocean. Current IOTC sea turtle conservation resolutions are outdated and do not include best-practice mitigation techniques. Res.12/04 should be modernized to include scientifically proven mitigation measures and devices recommended by the IOTC SC. IOTC should also require identification of sea turtles at species level so that the SC can better understand the impacts of fishing on turtles.

Priorities to Progress

- Progress the adoption of measures to limit fishing mortality on sharks, based on IOTC Scientific Committee recommendations.
- Strengthen bycatch mitigation measures for all taxa and for all fishing gears in line with any scientific best practices.

Bycatch Reduction Information & Resources

ELECTRONIC MONITORING (EM) AND REPORTING & OBSERVER COVERAGE

2026 Asks

- More fully embrace the use of electronic monitoring to increase observer coverage from the minimum 5% level for all gear types.
- Adopt measures to begin increasing observer coverage (human and/or electronic) from the minimum 5% and progress toward 100% coverage in industrial tuna fisheries.

Background

IOTC lags far behind other RFMO observer coverage rates. IOTC only requires 5% observer coverage regardless of gear and/or area of operation. Comprehensive and higher levels of observer coverage are critical to effective fisheries management; compliance monitoring; and independent verification of catch, effort, and non-target species interactions. The adoption of EM standards was a positive step forward. IOTC now has the tools to progressively increase the minimum level of monitoring coverage thereby implementing its Scientific Committee's advice.

Priorities to Progress

- Require 100% observer coverage (human and/or electronic) in industrial tuna fisheries, including supply vessels and all those engaged in at sea transshipment.

Electronic Monitoring and Reporting Information & Resources

VESSEL MONITORING SYSTEMS & PORT STATE MEASURES

2026 Asks

- Strengthen Res. 16/11 to be consistent with the FAO Port State Measures Agreement, including by adopting provisions for prioritizing vessels for inspection and including ports of CPCs outside the IOTC Agreement Area.
- To improve compliance with tuna conservation measures, adopt amendments to Res. 15/03 to strengthen the IOTC VMS, including by requiring simultaneous near real-time position reporting and ensuring systems are tamper-proof.

Background

IOTC's monitoring, control and surveillance measures are not sufficient to deter IUU fishing. CPC compliance with existing requirements is low. Further, IOTC's Port State measure (Res. 16/11) is not well aligned with the FAO Port State Measures Agreement. The IOTC VMS needs to be strengthened to meet best practices and improve regional efforts to combat IUU fishing and enhance vessel transparency.

Priorities to Progress

- Accelerate intersessional consultations to develop a regional VMS, including to explore an initial voluntary pilot program.

TRANSSHIPMENT REGULATION

2026 Asks

Amend IOTC at-sea transshipment Res. 25/05 to further strengthen the regulation of transshipment:

- Add recommended data fields from the FAO Guidelines, Annex I, to the IOTC transshipment declaration including, among others, vessel owner and company contact information, master contact details, intended location (at-sea position or port), and the amount of catch remaining on board after transshipment operations.
- Require all reporting to be electronic and in near real-time, but no greater than 24 hours after event, and that all transshipment declarations be submitted to flag State and IOTC Secretariat.
- Require all vessels authorized to conduct at-sea transshipment to have IMO number and operational automatic identification systems (AIS), and that VMS position data are provided to IOTC Secretariat in near-real time.

Background

The current Res. 24/05 should be improved to be more aligned with the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Transshipment, such as through strengthened authorization requirements, data collection and sharing, and verification and follow-up procedures.

Priorities to Progress

- Establish formal procedures for sharing transshipment data between other RFMOs.

Transshipment Regulation Information & Resources

LABOR & SOCIAL ISSUES IN TUNA FISHERIES

2026 Asks

- Adopt a binding measure that will ensure the safety of human observers, including those on supply and carrier vessels.
- Develop and then adopt a binding crew labor and safety resolution.

Background

Human observers can be subjected to unsafe or dangerous conditions and treatment on board fishing vessels. WCPFC, ICCAT and IATTC have all adopted observer safety measures. IOTC must now also do so as a matter of priority.

Tuna RFMOs must adopt binding measures to protect crew that work in tuna fisheries worldwide that align with relevant international frameworks for worker rights in global fisheries.