



AN OVERVIEW OF OMAN’S YELLOWFIN TUNA FISHERY AND POTENTIAL NON-COMPLIANCE WITH IOTC RESOLUTION 19/01

Prepared for the 30th Session of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission, May 2026

Indian Ocean tuna fisheries have been marked by persistent overfishing for much of the past decade. Yellowfin tuna (*Thunnus albacares*) was declared overfished and subject to overfishing by the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) in 2015, prompting a series of stock rebuilding plans aimed at reducing fishing pressure. These interim stock recovery plans experienced uneven implementation, instances of non-compliance and, in several cases, were severely weakened by objections. IOTC Resolution 21/01, currently in force, introduced CPC-specific catch limits for yellowfin tuna but received objections from India, Iran, Madagascar, Somalia and Oman, making it non-binding on these CPCs. Despite this, a 2024 stock assessment determined that yellowfin tuna was no longer overfished or subject to overfishing. However, the results of this assessment are highly contested, with the IOTC acknowledging “important uncertainties relating to the data used”¹, leaving scientists, NGOs and CPCs concerned about the true status of the stock.

This concern stems largely from the fact that total yellowfin catches have increased significantly since 2015 when the stock was declared overfished, calling into question how recovery could have occurred in the presence of such sustained fishing pressure. While some CPCs have made a concerted effort to reduce their yellowfin tuna catch over the past decade, catches made by the five CPCs who objected to IOTC Resolution 21/01 accounted for 35% of the total yellowfin catch in 2024.

Oman’s yellowfin tuna catch alone accounted for 18% of the total in 2024, up from 1.7% in 2014. This highlights the rapid expansion of the Omani fishery which went from catching 7,208 tonnes of yellowfin tuna in 2014 to catching 88,942 in 2024 – a twelve-fold increase during a decade-long overfishing crisis. This was facilitated by Oman’s objection to IOTC Resolution 21/01 on yellowfin tuna, leaving it bound by the previous stock rebuilding plan, IOTC Resolution 19/01, which set the following gear-specific limits²:

1. This resolution shall apply to all fishing vessels targeting tuna and tuna like species in the Indian Ocean of 24 meters overall length and over, and those under 24 meters if they fish outside the EEZ of their flag State, within the IOTC Area of Competence.

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5. Purse seine: CPCs whose purse seine catches of yellowfin reported for 2014 were above 5000 MT to reduce their purse seine catches of yellowfin by 15 % from the 2014 levels.

6. Gillnet: CPCs whose Gillnet catches of yellowfin reported for 2014 were above 2000 MT to reduce their Gillnet catches of yellowfin by 10 % from the 2014 levels.

¹ IOTC (2025). Report of the 29th Session of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission. Available: <https://iotc.org/sites/default/files/documents/2025/07/IOTC-2025-S29-RE.pdf>

² IOTC (2019). Resolution 19/01 on an interim plan for rebuilding the Indian Ocean yellowfin tuna stock in the IOTC area of competence. Available: https://iotc.org/sites/default/files/documents/compliance/cmm/iotc_cmm_1901.pdf

7. Longline: CPCs whose Longline catches of yellowfin reported for 2014 were above 5000 MT to reduce their Longline catches of yellowfin by 10 % from the 2014 levels.

8. CPCs' other gears: CPCs whose catches of yellowfin from other gears reported for 2014 were above 5000 MT to reduce their other gear catches of yellowfin by 5 % from the 2014 levels.

...

11. Any CPC to whom para 5-10 do not apply and whose catches exceeded the threshold limits in any subsequent year (from 2017), shall reduce their catches to the levels prescribed for that particular gear as mentioned in paragraphs 5, 6, 7 and 8.

Table 1 below breaks down Oman's yellowfin tuna catch by gear type from 2014 to 2024. Despite having dramatically increased its handline catches over the years, Oman is not subject to a catch limit for this gear, nor for its gillnet fleet. This is because Oman's handline and gillnet fleets are made up almost entirely of vessels less than 24m in length, meaning that paragraph 1 of IOTC Resolution 19/01 is not triggered and that paragraphs 6 and 8 do not apply.

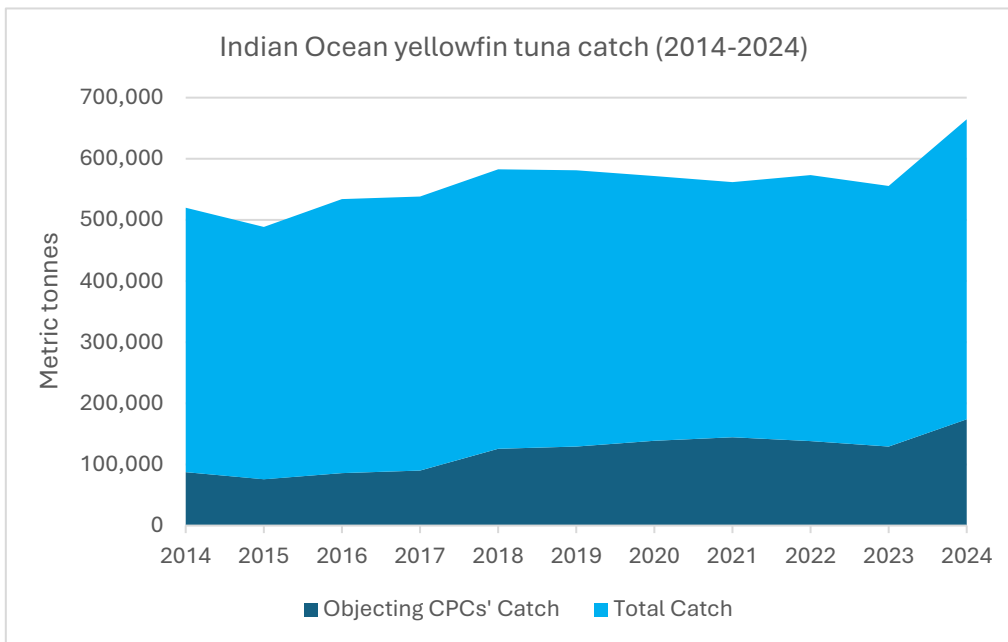


Figure 1: Total Indian Ocean yellowfin tuna catch and the portion of the total catch taken by CPCs currently objecting to IOTC Resolution 21/01³

Nonetheless, questions have been raised repeatedly at IOTC Compliance Committee meetings regarding the validity of Oman's increased yellowfin tuna catch figures. Oman claims that the sharp rise is due to "improved data collection and increased catches from the artisanal sector"⁴. However, in 2023 the IOTC Compliance Committee expressed "strong concerns" that Oman declined the Secretariat's offer to undertake a data compliance support mission to Oman, as

³ IOTC (2026). Best scientific estimates of retained catch data for the 16 species under the IOTC mandate (1950-2024). Available: <https://iotc.org/data/datasets/latest/NC/SCI>

⁴ IOTC (2023). Report of the 20th Session of the Compliance Committee. Available: https://iotc.org/sites/default/files/documents/2023/05/IOTC-2023-CoC20-RE_-_Final.pdf

requested by the Commission⁵. This offer was declined again in 2024 but has since been accepted, although it remains unclear exactly when the mission will take place.

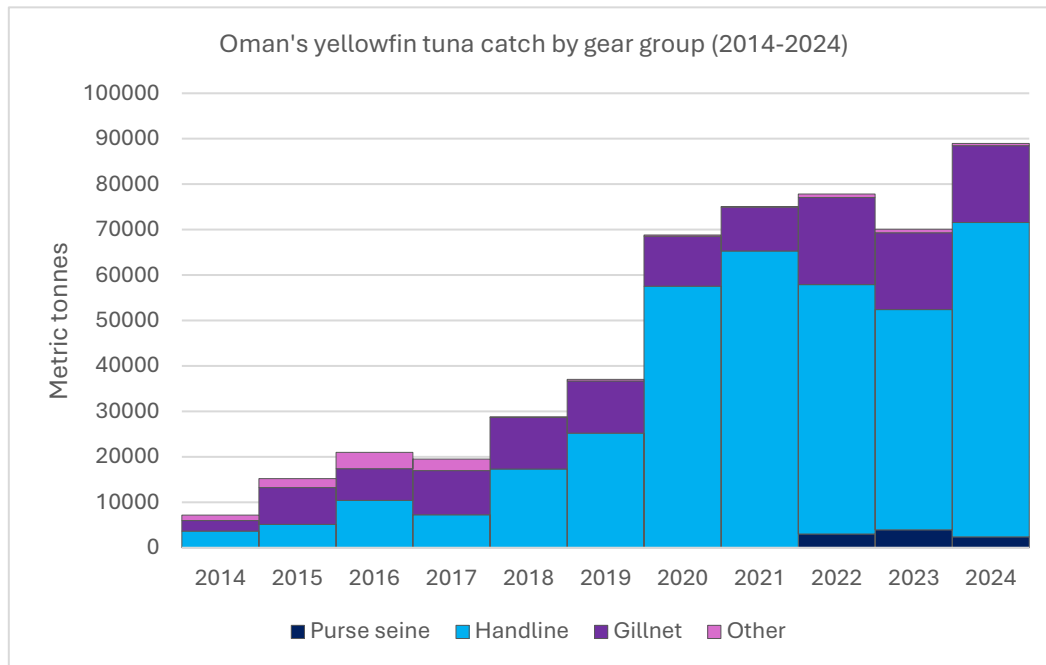


Figure 2: Oman's yellowfin tuna catch by gear group for the years 2014-2024⁶

Table 2 lists the purse seine and supply vessels currently flagged to Oman. Six of the eight vessels were originally part of the EU tuna purse seine fleet, and at least two of these vessels still have European beneficial ownership⁷. These are all large vessels able to fish on the high seas and therefore meet the criteria in paragraph 1 of IOTC Resolution 19/01. In addition, Oman entered into chartering agreements with two other European-owned purse seiners in 2025, one flagged to Kenya and the other flagged to Tanzania. Despite this expansion of the Omani fleet, paragraph 5 of IOTC Resolution 19/01 has not yet been triggered, as Oman's purse seine fleet has only ever reported a maximum of 3,924 tonnes of yellowfin tuna.

Given that this threshold laid out in paragraph 5 has not yet been crossed, Oman does not currently have a catch limit for its purse seine fleet. However, given how many purse seine and supply vessels currently fly the flag of Oman, it is highly likely that its purse seine fleet will exceed the 5,000-tonne yellowfin tuna threshold in 2025 or 2026. This will trigger Oman to receive a catch limit in accordance with paragraph 11 of IOTC Resolution 19/01. It is likely that this will result in Oman receiving a yellowfin tuna catch limit that is 85% of whatever it reports that its purse seine fleet caught in 2025 or 2026 (or in whichever year Oman first crosses the 5,000-tonne threshold).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ IOTC (2026). Best scientific estimates of retained catch data for the 16 species under the IOTC mandate (1950-2024). Available: <https://iotc.org/data/datasets/latest/NC/SCI>

⁷ Blue Marine Foundation (2026). Europe's Hidden Tuna Empire: Uncovering the true ownership of the Indian Ocean purse seine fleet. Available: <https://www.bluemarinefoundation.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/Beneficial-Ownership-Report.pdf>

Table 1: Oman's yellowfin tuna catch by gear type (2014-2024)⁸

Gear Type	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Beach seine		0			3		6				11
Gillnet	1,415	5,083	6,914	9,691	11,332	4,521	4,036	1,668	11,831	10,458	9,562
Gillnet (offshore)	853	3,062				6,995	6,925	7,924	7,301	6,453	7,381
Handline	3,683	5,124	10,449	7,256	17,311	25,201	57,547	65,321	54,877	48,505	69,110
Handline (offshore)											76
Longline (deep-freezing)	28	205	135	110	177	297	207	168	282	282	432
Purse seine									3,020	3,924	2,355
Trap				23	14	18	64		509	450	15
Troll line	1,229	1,709	3,486	2,419							
TOTAL	7,208	15,183	20,983	19,499	28,837	37,033	68,785	75,080	77,821	70,072	88,942

Table 2: Omani-flagged purse seine vessels

Name	IOTC Number	Type	Flag State	IMO	Previous Flag(s)	Previous Name	First authorised by IOTC	Flagged to Oman or entered the IO
<i>ADAMAS</i>	IOTC090112	Purse seiner	Oman	9957799			19/04/2024	18/07/2024
<i>TXORI BERRI</i>	IOTC000191	Purse seiner	Oman	9006033	Spain, Belize		01/01/2006	10/07/2022
<i>ACILA</i>	IOTC018830	Purse seiner	Oman	9957787			28/08/2023	10/08/2023
<i>LAYLA</i>	IOTC003575	Purse seiner	Oman	9322669	France	<i>GLENAN</i>	01/01/2006	19/01/2025
<i>NOUR</i>	IOTC003874	Purse seiner	Oman	9359703	France	<i>DRENNEC</i>	01/12/2006	19/01/2025
<i>HAWWA</i>	IOTC003810	Purse seiner	Oman	9359698	France	<i>TREVIGNON</i>	01/08/2006	19/01/2025
<i>TXORI BI</i>	IOTC015118	Supply vessel (purse seiners)	Oman	9319789	Spain		09/09/2013	12/07/2025
<i>AL MALAH</i>	IOTC090474	Supply vessel (purse seiners)	Oman	9095266	Spain, Belize		08/01/2025	22/10/2025

⁸ IOTC (2026). Best scientific estimates of retained catch data for the 16 species under the IOTC mandate (1950-2024). Available:

<https://iotc.org/data/datasets/latest/NC/SCI>



It should be noted that there is some debate regarding the interpretation and application of paragraph 11 of IOTC Resolution 19/01, as it encourages CPCs to report extremely high yellowfin tuna catches in the first year that they cross the 5,000-tonne threshold, given that this figure will determine their future purse seine catch limit. Given that Oman had six industrial purse seine vessels operating under its flag in 2025, in addition to two chartered vessels, it can be assumed that its reported purse seine catches for the year will be significant.

Another interpretation of paragraph 11 of IOTC Resolution 19/01 is that a catch limit of 5,000 tonnes should apply once the threshold has been crossed. This would eliminate the incentive for CPCs to engage in a 'race to the bottom' by trying to catch and report as much yellowfin tuna as they can in the hope of securing higher future catch allocation.

This is not the only point of contention when it comes to Oman's compliance with IOTC Resolution 19/01. The resolution also states the following⁹:

16. CPCs shall gradually reduce supply vessels by 31 December 2022 as specified below in (a), (b), and (c). Flag States shall submit the status of reducing the use of supply vessel as part of the report of Implementation to the Compliance Committee.

a) From 1 January 2018 to 31 December 2019: 1 supply vessel in support of not less than 2 purse seiners, all of the same flag State.

b) From 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2020: 2 supply vessels in support of not less than 5 purse seiners, all of the same flag State.

c) No CPC is allowed to register any new or additional supply vessel on the IOTC Record of Authorized Vessels after 31 December 2017.

As Table 2 shows, Oman has flagged two supply vessels since IOTC Resolution 19/01 came into effect. While some may interpret "new or additional" to mean any new or additional vessels that had not previously been flagged to an IOTC CPC, the prevailing interpretation is that, in order to be considered new, a vessel must not previously have been registered on the IOTC's Record of Authorised Vessels (RAV). TXORI BI was first registered to the RAV in 2013, flying the flag of Spain. However, AL MALAH had not previously been registered.

In its communication with the IOTC Secretariat in February 2026, the European Commission stated that "the registration of the vessel AL MALAH on 28 July 2025 appears to be inconsistent with paragraph 16(c) of Resolution 19/01, which provides that no CPC shall register any new or additional supply vessel on the IOTC RAV" and went on to state that "[i]n the absence of any corrective action or clarification from the flag State following our initial notification, we hereby notify, in accordance with paragraph 5 of Resolution 24/03, the proposal to include the vessel AL MALAH on the IOTC IUU Vessel List" (the IOTC's list of vessels presumed to have conducted illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing)¹⁰.

⁹ IOTC (2019). Resolution 19/01 on an interim plan for rebuilding the Indian Ocean yellowfin tuna stock in the IOTC area of competence. Available:

https://iotc.org/sites/default/files/documents/compliance/cmm/iotc_cmm_1901.pdf

¹⁰ IOTC (2026). The IOTC Draft IUU Vessels List. Available:

https://iotc.org/sites/default/files/documents/2026/04/IOTC-2026-CoC23-12E-DRAFT_IOTC_IUU_VESSELS_LIST.pdf



In Oman's response, it stated that paragraph 16 of IOTC Resolution 19/01 "only applies to CPCs **that at the time already had** purse seiners and supply vessels"¹¹, despite the paragraph clearly stating that "**No CPC** is allowed to register any new or additional supply vessel on the IOTC Record of Authorized Vessels after 31 December 2017"¹², showing that the paragraph applies to all IOTC CPCs, without exception.

In 2024, Oman clearly demonstrated that it understood and interpreted that the supply vessel obligation would apply to it. In defence of its objection to Resolution 24/02 (which included the same supply vessel obligation), Oman stated that the obligation "eliminates the right of registering supply vessels to those CPCs who have not registered any supply vessel yet"¹³.

Indeed, in its response to the EU's proposal to include AL MALAH on the IOTC IUU Vessel List, Oman stated that its "purse seiners shipowners made a huge effort to find supply vessels on sale, that were already registered by other CPCs in IOTC Record of Authorized Vessels" but that only one could be found (the still Spanish-owned TXORI BI) and, as a result, "shipowners were obliged to search a supply vessel, upon the strict condition to have had a clean tracked record and registered and in other RFMOs [*sic*]"¹⁴. Once again, this shows that Oman understood and felt bound to observe the obligation in paragraph 16. The availability or otherwise of appropriate supply vessels for sale does not change this obligation. If it did, all IOTC Resolutions would only apply when convenient to the fishing industry.

Among Oman's other responses was a reference to the registration of the Seychellois-flagged, Spanish-owned supply vessel ALTARRI which did not have a continuous year-by-year presence on the RAV¹⁵. For the reasons explained above, this vessel would not be considered "new or additional", given its past registration on the RAV prior to its re-registration in 2024, but even if it were, two wrongs do not make a right, and this would have had no bearing on AL MALAH's situation.

The 23rd Session of the IOTC Compliance Committee in May 2026 concluded with an agreement from Oman to de-register AL MALAH from the IOTC RAV. The EU also agreed to no longer pursue the vessel's addition to the IOTC IUU Vessel list. However, it is likely that discussions on the interpretation of Resolution 19/01 will continue during the 30th Session of the IOTC.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² IOTC (2019). Resolution 19/01 on an interim plan for rebuilding the Indian Ocean yellowfin tuna stock in the IOTC area of competence. Available:

https://iotc.org/sites/default/files/documents/compliance/cmm/iotc_cmm_1901.pdf

¹³ IOTC (2024). IOTC Circular: Objection from Oman to IOTC Resolution 24/02. Available:

https://iotc.org/sites/default/files/documents/2024/09/Circular_2024-47_-_Communication_from_OmanE.pdf

¹⁴ IOTC (2026). The IOTC Draft IUU Vessels List. Available:

https://iotc.org/sites/default/files/documents/2026/04/IOTC-2026-CoC23-12E-DRAFT_IOTC_IUU_VESSELS_LIST.pdf

¹⁵ Ibid.

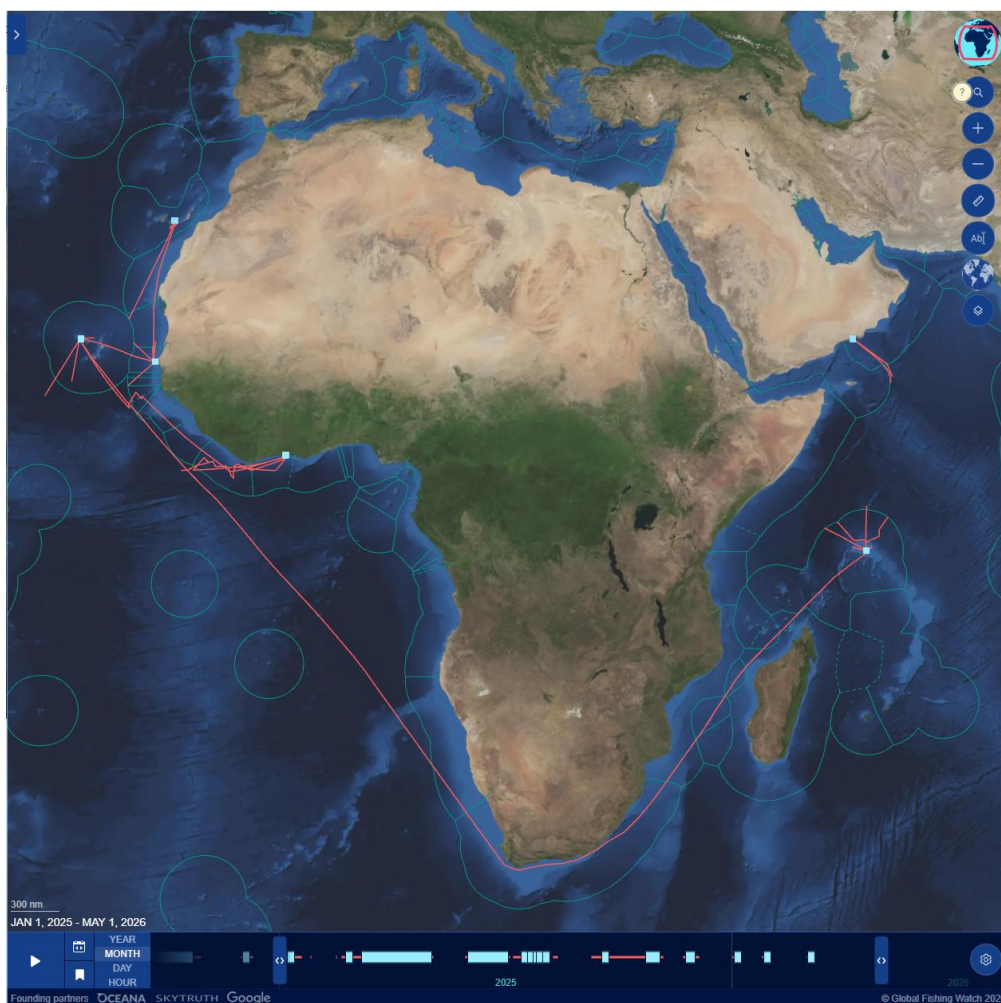


Figure 3: AL MALAH's movements between 1 January 2025 – 1 May 2026¹⁶

A previous version of this paper was submitted to the 23rd Session of the IOTC Compliance Committee in May 2026 and published on the CoC23 meeting page as an information paper. However, at the request of the Omani delegation, the Secretariat removed the paper and declined to republish it, despite repeated requests from Blue Marine for it to do so, and despite questions raised by Maldives during the Compliance Committee meeting seeking clarification on the process followed by the Secretariat in its decision to remove the information paper.

Blue Marine would like to clarify that this information paper, like the previous version, does not serve as an accusation of illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing and provides no new evidence of such, but is merely a discussion of the situation of a vessel already listed on the IOTC Draft IUU Vessel list and an examination of the general characteristics of Oman's ever-growing yellowfin tuna fishery.

¹⁶ Global Fishing Watch (2026). Accessed on 3 May 2026. Available [here](#).