ON AN INTERIM PLAN FOR UTILIZING ~~REBUILDING~~ THE INDIAN OCEAN YELLOWFIN TUNA STOCK IN THE IOTC AREA OF COMPETENCE

Submitted by: Tanzania, Kenya, Mauritius

Explanatory Memorandum

1. The proposed Resolution revokes the following Resolutions:

- Resolution 21/01 *on an Interim Plan for Rebuilding the Indian Ocean Yellowfin Tuna Stock in the IOTC Area of Competence*

2. This interim measure responds to the confirmed recovery of the yellowfin stock in 2024, the resolution of uncertainties in 2025, and the need to ensure that the benefits of stock recovery are shared equitably while maintaining precaution.

RESOLUTION 26/XX
ON AN INTERIM PLAN FOR REBUILDING THE INDIAN OCEAN YELLOWFIN TUNA STOCK IN THE IOTC AREA OF COMPETENCE

[Presented by: Tanzania, Kenya, Mauritius]

Keywords: Yellowfin tuna, Kobe Process, MSY

Preamble:

The interim allocation of the catch limit for yellowfin tuna began in 2016, following the scientific committee's assessment in 2015, through resolution 16/01. The yellowfin tuna stock has been assessed as overfished since 2014 due to a steady rise in harvest levels by some CPCs.

Following a concerted effort by all CPCs, including both large and small harvesters, through the application of catch limits over the past decade, the most recent stock assessment in 2024 indicated recovery of the stock. There were some uncertainties in 2024, but these have been addressed in 2025.

Using a revised model that incorporated the 2024 advice (421,000 t), projections estimated that, at the 2023 catch level, the stock would remain above SBMSY_recent with 89.7% probability by 2026 and 83% probability by 2033.

The Scientific Committee recognizes that the median MSY estimate from the 2024 stock assessment is 421,000 t, and that maintaining catches within the MSY range of 416,000-430,000 t provides more than a 50% probability of remaining above SBMSY by 2033

~~Furthermore, the latest assessment shows that if catches are maintained within the MSY range (416,000-430,000 t), there is more than a 50% probability the stock will remain above SBMSY in 2033.~~

The probability of breaching the F limit reference point with recent catch (last stock assessment was based on 2023 catches at 400, 950t) is estimated at 0% by 2033.

It is to be noted that the Commission would set a new TAC for the period 2026, 2027, and 2028, not exceeding the median recent MSY estimate (421,000 t), to account for uncertainties related to high recruitment levels.

Despite the above positive outlook, maintaining catch limits remains essential to ensure long-term sustainability, recognizing that these limits would lapse and be reviewed upon the coming into force of any future allocation framework.

Resolution 21/01 relied heavily on historical catches in establishing catch limits, thus resulting in disparity among Members. Actually, 80% of the catch limits are attributed to about seven members.

In determining future increases in catch opportunities arising from stock recovery, priority shall be given to CPCs with historically low yellowfin tuna catches, particularly developing coastal States and SIDS whose small-scale fisheries have not contributed to past overfishing.

In applying this Resolution, attention is given to large disparities between small and large harvesters, where historical catch rules and greater fishing capacity favour large harvesters. In contrast, small harvesters call for fairer access to protect livelihoods and food security.

The Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC)

CONSIDERING the objectives of the Commission to maintain stocks in perpetuity and with high probability, at levels not less than those capable of producing their maximum sustainable yield as qualified by relevant environmental and economic factors, including the special requirements of developing States in the IOTC area of Competence;

BEING MINDFUL of Article XVI of the IOTC Agreement regarding the rights of Coastal States and of Articles 87 and 116 of the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea regarding the right to fish on the high seas;

RECOGNISING the special requirements of the developing States, particularly Small Island developing States, in Article 24(b), of the Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea of December 1982, relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks (UNFSA);

FURTHER RECOGNISING the need to ensure that conservation and management measures do not result in transferring, directly or indirectly, a disproportionate burden of conservation action onto developing States, Article 24(c) of UNFSA;

RECALLING that Article 5 of UNFSA entitles the conservation and management of highly migratory fish stocks to be based on best scientific evidence available and with special reference to IOTC Resolution 15/10;

RECALLING the drafting of a specification document for the yellowfin MP and that the framework for this specification document used for multi-species MPs in ICCAT may be applied in future to multi-species MSE work in the IOTC;

FURTHER RECALLING the various reports and policy discussions published by the UN on equitable opportunities between small-scale and large-scale harvesters, like the FAO – Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries (2014), the UN Sustainable Development Goal 14 (Life Below Water), the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) Reports and the UNCTAD & FAO Joint Studies on Tuna Trade;

CONSIDERING the recommendations adopted by the KOBE III, held in La Jolla, California, 12- 14 July 2011; considering the status of the stocks, each RFMO should consider a scheme for reduction of overcapacity in a way that does not constrain the access to, development of, and benefit from sustainable tuna fisheries, including on the high seas, by developing coastal States, in particular Small Island Developing States, territories, and States with small and vulnerable economies; and Transfer of capacity from developed fishing members to developing coastal fishing members within its area of Competence where appropriate;

FURTHER CONSIDERING the call by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 70/75 upon the States to increase the reliance on scientific advice in developing, adopting and implementing conservation and management measures and to take into account the special requirements of developing States, including Small Island Developing States (SIDS), as highlighted in the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway;

NOTING THAT Article V.2b of the Agreement for the Establishment of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission gives full recognition to the special interests and needs of Members in the region that are developing countries, in relation to the conservation and management and optimum utilization of stocks covered by this Agreement and encouraging development of fisheries based on such stocks;

FURTHER NOTING THAT Article V.2d requires the Commission to keep under review the economic and social aspects of the fisheries based on the stocks covered by this Agreement, bearing in mind, in particular, the interests of developing coastal States. This includes ensuring that conservation and management measures adopted by it do

not result in transferring, directly or indirectly, a disproportionate burden of conservation action onto developing States, especially Small Island Developing States;

RECOGNISING FURTHER the interactions that occur between the fisheries for yellowfin, skipjack and bigeye tuna;

FURTHER CONSIDERING the confirmation of the recovery of the yellowfin stocks at the 28th Session of the Scientific Committee based on the most recent assessment in 2024, and the uncertainties addressed in 2025;

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

RECOGNISING that CPCs with historically low yellowfin tuna catches, particularly developing coastal States and SIDS, have special requirements and have not contributed to the elevated catch levels that exceeded MSY; and that such CPCs should receive priority access to any additional catch opportunities arising from stock recovery;

RECOGNISING the sovereign rights of developing coastal states with low historical catches but with aspirations to progressively develop the tuna fishery;

CONSIDERING that coastal and least developed CPCs have consistently sought, during plenary discussions, the possibility of developing their fishing fleets

RECOGNISING that the three main tropical tuna species are already subject to catch limits and that the TCAC process has been ongoing since 2011 and has not been finalized yet;

EMPHASIZING on the need for equitable outcomes and minimizing disparity in the sharing of the catch limits among IOTC Members;

ADOPTS, in accordance with the provisions of 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.

2. This Resolution will be effective from 1 January 2027. The measures contained in this Resolution shall be considered interim measures and will be reviewed by the Commission no later than its annual Session in 2029.

3. Notwithstanding paragraph 2, this Resolution shall be reviewed when the Commission adopts a formal Management Procedure for the management of the yellowfin tuna stock and is in effect.

4. ~~Nothing in this Resolution shall pre-empt or prejudice future allocation of fishing opportunities.~~ The catch limits and allocation categories established in this Resolution are interim and do not prejudice, pre-empt, or serve as a precedent for the future permanent allocation criteria currently under negotiation within the Technical Committee on Allocation Criteria (TCAC)

5. Catch limits and Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for ~~y~~Yellowfin Tuna

A review of the existing yellowfin tuna catch limits, taking into consideration the MSY established after the most recent stock assessment carried out in 2024 and the uncertainties addressed in 2025, is proposed for better equity and fair distribution
of the yellowfin catches.

~~There will be set aside 20,000 MT of yellowfin per year from the current 81,000 MT available, meaning that the allocated amount will be 61,000 MT.~~ ~~The 20,000 MT is meant to ensure that the stocks of the yellowfin tuna remain healthy.~~

~~The 20,000 t set-aside constitutes a precautionary buffer to account for recruitment uncertainty identified by the Scientific Committee in 2024 and clarified in 2025, ensuring that total catches remain below the median MSY estimate~~

6. The Commission shall adopt the following categories for CPCs:
   a. Large harvesters (≥ 20,000 tons)
   b. ≥ 3,000 tons but < 20,000 tons ~~Categories are based on the 2026 allocated catch limit for different CPCs in the IOTC area of Competence:.~~ ~~(CPCs are listed in alphabetical order per category)~~
   c. < 3,000 tons

Category	CPC	**IOTC 21/01**	**%**	**Proposed**
A	EU	73,078	**22**	73,078
	IND		-	
	IDN	45,426	**13.7**	45,426
	IRN		-	
	LKA	33,123	**10**	33,123
	MDV	47,195	**14.2**	47,195
	OMN		-	
	SYC	39,577	**11.9**	39,577
B	CHN	10,557	3.2	12,000
	COM	5,279	1.6	7,279
	JPN	4,003	1.2	4,003
	KEN	3,654	1.1	9,754
	KOR	9,056	2.7	9,056
	MUS	10,490	3.2	16,590
	PAK	14,468	4.4	16,468
	SOM		-	-
	TZA	3,872	1.2	10,005
	YEM	16,474	5	18,474
C	AUS	2000	0.6	*
	BGD	2000	0.6	*
	FRA	500	0.2	*
	GBR	500	0.2	*
	MDG		-	
	MOZ	2,000	0.6	*
	MYS	2000	0.6	*
	PHL	700	0.2	*
	SDN	2000	0.6	*
	THA	2000	0.6	*
	ZAF	2000	0.6	*
	Others			10,000
	Total	**331,953**		**357,028**

* represents allocation for CPCs landing less than 2,000 MT hereby referred to as others in the table

Any CPCs harvesting more than 20,000* MT *of yellowfin tuna annually will be treated as a large harvester

7. The Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for yellowfin tuna for the period 2026-2028 shall not exceed 421,000 tonnes.
8. The specific catch limits for each CPC, calculated based on the categories defined in paragraph 6 above ~~below~~(A, B and C), are provided in the comprehensive Catch Table~~-~~.
9. The increases for Categories B and C shall be~~are~~ derived from the need to correct long-standing disparities in historical catch allocations while remaining fully within the TAC envelope and without increasing total fishing mortality

~~6.~~**10.** ~~**For**~~ CPCs in Category A~~,~~ shall maintain their current catch limits

~~Will maintain the current catch limits~~

~~7.~~11. CPCs in Category B shall have their catch limits increased by 30,776 tons to be shared among the CPCs for equity and fair access to the resource by small and big harvesters, and to allow the small harvesters develop their domestic fleets.

~~CPCs included in Category B should have their catch limits increased by 37, 000 tons to be shared among the CPCs for better equity and fair access to the resource by small and big harvesters. This will allow the small harvesters to develop their fleet.~~

~~8.~~12. CPCs in Category C shall have their catch limits increased by 10,000 tons to be shared among the CPCs for better equity and fair access to the resource by small and big harvesters

~~CPCs in Category C should have their catch limits increased by 24, 000 tons to be shared among the CPCs for better equity and fair access to the resource by small and big harvesters~~.

~~9.~~**13.** CPCs ~~in Category D~~not included para 10, 11 and 12 will utilize 68,972 tons.

~~Coastal States in Category D will be allowed to maintain their current catch limit.~~

Over catch of annual limit

~~10.~~14. If any Category A, B and C CPC exceeds its catch limit, 100% of the overage of the catch limit shall be deducted from the respective CPC's catch limit during or before the refunded year as follows:

Harvest year	Refunded year
2026	2028
2027	2029
2028	2030
2029	2031

a. consistent with best practice and to deter systematic non-compliance while ensuring that total catches remain within the TAC, ~~over-catch for that~~ a CPC ~~has occurred~~having a 125% over-catch in two or more consecutive years~~, in which case 125% of the over-catch~~ shall have that over-catch ~~be~~ deducted from the following two years limit.

~~11.~~15. Underage of catch

a. Any underage of the annual catch limits made by Coastal Developing States and SIDS in Categories B and~~to~~ C~~D~~ established in this Resolution may be carried over to the corresponding adjustment year specified in paragraph 1~~4~~3.

b. Up to [40%] of an underage of the annual catch limits made by Coastal Developing States and SIDS established in this Resolution may be carried over to the corresponding adjustment year specified in paragraph 1~~4~~3.

~~b.~~

~~12.~~16. CPCs that are subject to catch reductions due to over-catch shall inform the Commission via the IOTC Compliance Committee, corrective actions taken by the CPC to adhere to the prescribed catch levels, in their implementation Report.

~~13.~~17. The revised limits from paragraph 1~~6~~2 will apply in the following year and CPCs compliance shall be assessed against the revised limits reported to the IOTC Compliance Committee.

~~14.~~18. The tropical tuna data submitted by CPCs in accordance with Resolution 15/01 *"On the recording of catch and effort data by fishing vessels in the IOTC area of competence"* and Resolution 15/02 *"Mandatory statistical reporting requirements for IOTC Contracting Parties and Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties (CPCs)"* shall be reviewed by the Secretariat and discussed by the Scientific Committee for possible inconsistencies. In such cases, the Scientific Committee shall provide the rationale of the detected inconsistencies and justify the choice of the best solution available with regard the scientific analysis to be carried out. Data used for catch limit calculations shall be based on the data reviewed, including possible estimates, by the Secretariat.

~~***Gillnet***~~

~~15. Without prejudice to Article 16 of the IOTC Agreement, CPCs shall encourage phasing out or convert gillnet fishing vessels to other gears, considering the huge ecological impact of these gears and fast track the implementation of Resolution 17/07 *"On the Prohibition to use large-scale driftnets in the IOTC"*, noting that large-scale driftnets are prohibited in the IOTC Area of Competence from 1 January 2022.~~

~~16. CPCs shall set their gillnets at 2m depth from the surface in gillnet fisheries by 2023 to mitigate ecological impacts of gillnets.~~

~~17. CPCs are encouraged to increase their observer coverage or field sampling in gillnet fishing vessels by 10% using alternative data collection methodologies (electronic or human) verified by the IOTC Scientific Committee.~~

~~18. CPCs shall report the level of implementation of paragraphs 22-24 to the Commission via the Compliance Committee.~~

Administration

19. For the purposes of the implementation of this Resolution, each CPC shall, by 15 February of the following year, notify to the Executive Secretary the list of vessels, which have fished for yellowfin tuna in the IOTC area of Competence for the preceding year.

20. The IOTC Secretariat shall report each year these lists of active vessels to the IOTC Compliance Committee and to the IOTC Scientific Committee in the form of aggregated statistics concerning fishing fleets capacity metrics.

21. CPCs shall monitor the yellowfin tuna catches from their vessels in conformity with Resolution 15/01 *"On the recording of catch and effort data by fishing vessels in the IOTC area of competence"* and Resolution 15/02 *"Mandatory statistical reporting requirements for IOTC Contracting Parties and Cooperating Non Contracting Parties (CPCs)"* and will provide a summary of most-recent yellowfin catches for the consideration of the IOTC Compliance Committee.

22. Each year, the IOTC Compliance Committee shall evaluate the level of compliance with the reporting obligations and the catch limits deriving from this Resolution and shall make recommendations to the Commission accordingly.

23. The IOTC Scientific Committee via its Working Party on Tropical Tunas shall implement the "Workplan to improve current assessment of yellowfin tuna" and shall advice the Commission the financial and administrational requirements to further strengthen the work undertaken to minimize the issues and complexities regarding yellowfin tuna stock assessment.

24. The IOTC Working Party on Tropical Tunas and the Scientific Committee the ~~-~~shall prioritise the work on the yellowfin tuna management procedure and to provide advice to the Technical Committee on Management Procedures to finalise the yellowfin tuna management procedure, to enable the Commission to adopt the yellowfin tuna management procedure at the earliest opportunity.

25. The Scientific Committee via its Working Party on Tropical Tunas shall undertake evaluation of the effectiveness of the measures detailed in this Resolution, taking into account all sources of fishing mortality possible aiming at returning and maintaining biomass levels at the Commission's target level.

26. This Resolution supersedes IOTC Resolution 21/01 *On an interim plan for rebuilding the Indian Ocean yellowfin tuna stock.*

~~26.~~