

## A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF MALDIVES SKIPJACK FISHERY

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### COUNTRY SETTINGS

Maldives is a nation of small islands located in the central Indian Ocean. The archipelago consists of about 1,200 islands of which about 200 are currently inhabited. These islands are found in 26 natural atolls and for administrative purposes the islands are grouped into 20 administrative areas. Maldives covers an area of 90,000 square kilometers and is located about 600 kilometers off south west Sri Lanka, stretching along 73° East longitude from about 8° North to 1° South. The country has a total land area of about 298 square kilometers of which less than 10 percent is being used for agriculture. Agricultural activity is limited in Maldives because of the limited land based resources.

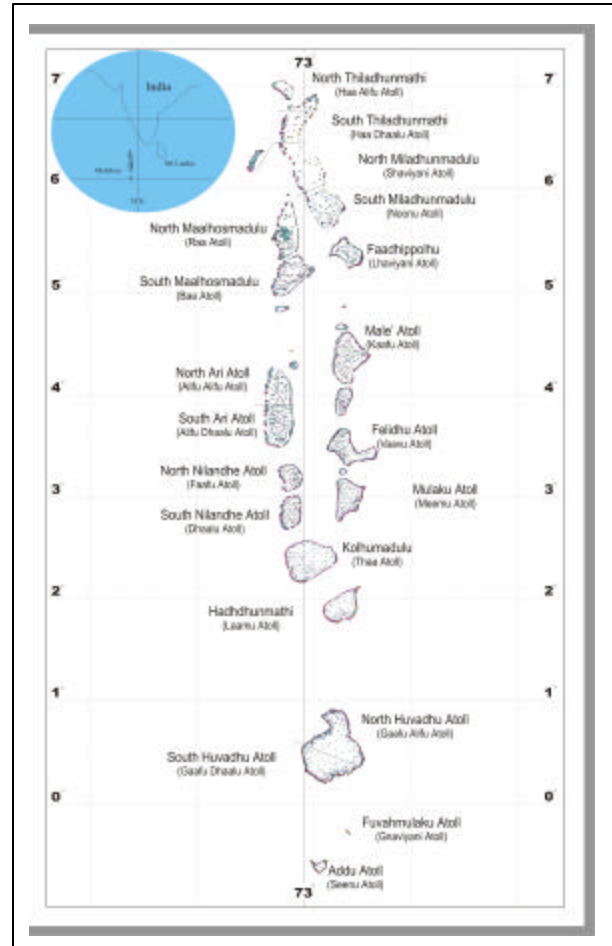
### CONTEXT OF FISHERIES SECTOR

The potential for developing a modern economy in Maldives largely rests on two economic sectors - fishing and tourism. Since a large area of the sea surrounds the archipelago, fishing has always been one of the main economic activities of the country. Currently fisheries account for about 11 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP), 21 percent of employment and 75 percent of the countries export commodities.

Fishing is the most important sector in the Maldives in socio-economic terms as it provides a substantial source of food, employment and export earnings for Maldives. The tuna fishery is the major fishery and takes place all year round throughout the country. The main species caught are skipjack tuna (*Katsuwonus pelamis*), Juveniles of yellowfin tuna (*Thunnus albacares*), and to a lesser extent big eye tuna (*Thunnus obesus*). These fishes are caught on open waters, around Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs), drifting flotsam and sometimes along the reef edge, mainly by pole and line.

### MALDIVES CONCERN ON SKIPJACK FISHERY

Although Maldivian tuna fishery has survived for centuries, the resources on which it is based are now being exploited at a higher level than ever before. Since they are not confined to any one national jurisdiction, and moves freely between different Exclusive Economic Zones and High Seas waters, there is a real concern that Maldives tuna catches will be adversely affected by the great increase in



tuna fishing effort in the Indian Ocean. Already there are signs that this may be happening. In recent years, skipjack catches have stagnated and average sizes have declined. Catch rates of large skipjack on the northwest side of the Maldives have fallen in parallel with the rise of the western Indian Ocean purseine fishery.

A collapse of the tuna fishery would be a catastrophe for the Maldives. There is therefore, a clear need for a better understanding of the dynamics of tuna population in the Indian Ocean, in order to provide the information required for managing sustainable utilization. Maldives supports for such studies and strongly recommends controlling the purseine catch in the Indian Ocean.