



TRAFFIC

WWF and TRAFFIC

Joint Position Statement to the First Meeting of the Working Party on Bycatch of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission

July 2005

WWF is the world's largest and most experienced independent conservation organisation, with close to five million supporters and a global network active in more than 90 countries.

WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by:

- conserving the world's biological diversity;
- ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable; and
- promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption.

TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade monitoring network, works to ensure that the trade in wild plants and animals is not a threat to the conservation of nature. TRAFFIC is a joint programme of WWF and IUCN-The World Conservation Union.

WWF and TRAFFIC appreciate the opportunity to provide a statement to the first meeting of the Working Party on Bycatch.

WWF and TRAFFIC would like to acknowledge the significant collective experience and knowledge of the participants in the Working Group and we would like to offer our assistance in pursuing the following issues, which we consider to be priorities:

Implementing International Plans of Action

WWF and TRAFFIC propose that the FAO International Plans of Action (IPOA) on Seabirds and Sharks, and the FAO Technical Guidelines to Reduce Sea Turtle Mortality in Fishing Operations, be utilised in forming potential mitigation strategies and data collection.

Improving data collection and reporting frameworks

We encourage the participants at this meeting to adopt a framework through which all Contracting Parties, Cooperating non-Contracting Parties, Entities or Fishing Entities (CPCs) shall report data (for catches of sharks as a priority), in accordance with IOTC data reporting procedures (including available historical data), as well as information on the performance of mitigation measures, and efforts to increase bilateral or multilateral cooperation with other CPCs and regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs). Such reports might best be delivered at the beginning of sessions of relevant meetings.

We are encouraged by the objectives established for this Working Party on Bycatch by the Scientific Committee and, in addition to the specific issues raised in this statement, we would urge participants to consider developing a detailed research plan to assess the impacts of the fishery on broader ecosystems.

Expanding observer programmes

Given that observer programmes are an essential tool in monitoring and assessing bycatch and bycatch mitigation measures, we would encourage participants to implement or extend these programmes as appropriate. We would also encourage participants to consider how best to develop standardised protocols to enable better collaboration among CPCs, and between RFMOs.

Delivering advice despite data scarcity

WWF and TRAFFIC view bycatch mitigation strategies and management measures, where necessary, as an essential part of ecosystem based management for any fishery. While global estimates of seabird, marine turtle and shark numbers caught as bycatch provide cause for considerable concern, there is very little published data available from the Indian Ocean tuna fisheries, with the possible exception of some South African, Australian and possibly European Commission fisheries.

Focusing on elasmobranchs

We share the concern of many scientists about the lack of data collected and/or publicly available on the catch and bycatch of elasmobranchs throughout the Indian Ocean. To a large degree, the resolution on sharks at IOTC 9 reflects implicitly the urgency of this concern. The inadequacy of research and monitoring activity targeted at elasmobranchs and the consequent lack of data on which to base assessments of threat, to identify critical habitats and to make recommendations for sustainable harvesting strategies, currently makes it challenging to manage sharks within the Indian Ocean.

As would be well understood by participants at this meeting, adopting strong, adaptive management measures in the short term implies that adjustments in the medium to long term can be made when better information becomes available.

We believe that given the inherent constraints posed by the problem of data scarcity, scientists are best placed to provide advice that will inform the implementation of appropriate precautionary measures. Part of the advice will no doubt point to practical steps to develop effective data collection processes, but given the ongoing and intensive effort in the fishery, advice on the fate of bycatch species under various catch scenarios, and on workable mitigation measures is essential.

We also believe that the resolution on sharks at IOTC 9 reiterates the importance of scientific advice on stock assessments of key bycatch species and provides a useful platform for the consideration of the Working Party. Furthermore, we believe that this reflects the widely held opinion that the shortage of scientific data should not delay the implementation of management interventions.

We strongly encourage the Working Party on Bycatch to take this opportunity to generate at least preliminary advice upon which the IOTC will be able to take firm management action.

We would also reiterate our encouragement of the Working Party to be guided by the FAO IPOA-Sharks. For example, while we are encouraged that the resolution on sharks at IOTC 9 makes specific reference to shark finning, we urge participants at this Working Party meeting to provide advice to the IOTC as to whether the resolution will adequately address this issue, particularly in light of the implementation of this important aspect of FAO IPOA-Sharks.

Providing specific advice on turtles

WWF and TRAFFIC acknowledge the progress made in IOTC 9, manifest through the recommendation on sea turtles but would like to see this strengthened at the next session.

We believe the strong scientific presence at the Working Party meeting will provide a solid platform upon which a comprehensive risk assessment can be made of the impact on turtles of different gear types and fishing practices in the Indian Ocean. We acknowledge that significant efforts have been made in some areas and that greater collaboration will see practical and effective mitigation measures adopted more widely. We also understand that the outcomes of trials of new forms of gear such as circle hooks in other fisheries will be a significant relevance to the Indian Ocean and we encourage further collaboration.

- **FADs**

We hope that the meeting will be able to provide specific guidance on assessing the impact of fish aggregating devices (FADs) on turtles. We have been informed that juvenile turtles have become caught in the 'raft' structure (and in the netting) of some FADs used in the Western Indian Ocean, in particular. We believe that some fleets have sought to redesign FADs to reduce their impacts; action which we would applaud but that

we have not yet been able to verify. We encourage all scientists who may have knowledge of the threat of FADs and of mitigation trials to use this first meeting of the Working Party to share their experiences.

We also hope the Working Party will seek to implement research programs that will reduce elasmobranch bycatch in the purse-seine fishery.

Delivering stronger resolutions on seabirds

WWF and TRAFFIC were encouraged by the spirit of the recommendation on seabirds at IOTC 9. However, we believe stronger and more comprehensive resolutions will be needed in future and would call on scientists, particularly those from countries which have made significant progress on seabird bycatch mitigation, to take the opportunity presented by this meeting to improve the collective understanding of risk and of effective mitigation.

We urge participants at the meeting to seek opportunities to work closely with other RFMOs on seabird bycatch mitigation. To this end, for example, we understand that the secretariat of the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) has written to the IOTC seeking to increase collaboration. We applaud this initiative and look forward to practical outcomes from this and other similar interactions.

Conclusion and an invitation to further collaboration

WWF and TRAFFIC would like to encourage scientists at this first meeting of the Working Party on Bycatch to take advantage of the sense of urgency so strongly expressed at IOTC 9. This meeting represents a very important moment in the work of the IOTC. Cogent advice on the levels of risk to species and ecosystems, and on effective bycatch mitigation measures, will provide an essential platform for the next phase of the IOTC's revitalisation.

Furthermore, we would like to encourage participants to consider working with us to implement bycatch mitigation trials and other conservation initiatives. For example, WWF has implemented such practices with a range of partners, including the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration of the US, local fishing industry partners and governments. Another example is the translation into a variety of languages of guidelines on marine species identification and bycatch mitigation (such as the translations of the "Catch fish not turtles" brochure). This work has only been possible through working in collaboration with a variety of partners. There is the potential to form similar partnerships with IOTC member states, fishing fleets and research organisations in the Indian Ocean.

For further information contact:

Markus Bürgener
Senior Programme Officer
TRAFFIC East/Southern Africa
C/o South African National Biodiversity Institute
Private bag x7
Claremont 7735
South Africa
Telephone: (27) 021 799 8673
Fax: (27) 021 797 8390
E-mail: burgener@sanbi.org

TRAFFIC International
219c Huntingdon Road
Cambridge CB3 0DL
United Kingdom
Telephone: (44) 1223 277427
Fax: (44) 1223 277427
Website: www.traffic.org

Paul Gamblin
Senior Policy Officer, Oceans and Coasts
WWF Australia
Panda Cottage - Herdsman Lake
Flynn St (cnr Selby St)
PO Box 4010, Wembley WA 6913
Telephone: (61) 8 9387 6444
Fax: (61) 8 9387 6180
E-mail: pgamblin@wwf.org.au

Ms. Jane Mbendo
EAME Policy Officer
WWF Tanzania Programme Office
Regent Estate 350 Mikocheni
P.O.Box 63117 Dar es Salaam
Telephone: (255) 22 2772455/2700077
Fax: (255) 22 2775535
Website: www.panda.org