



## Policy Priorities for the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission

The Pew Charitable Trusts recommends that the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) takes the following actions at its 19<sup>th</sup> Session in Busan, Korea to ensure sustainable fisheries:

### Conservation and Management Measures to Protect Sharks

**Regulate all shark catch:** Every year, about 100 million sharks are caught and killed in commercial fisheries, an unsustainable number. Whether this catch is unintended, unwanted, or highly sought after, the impact on ocean ecosystems demands urgent action. IOTC fisheries must not contribute to the global overfishing of sharks that has led to severe declines wherever they are found. If IOTC members are to continue to target sharks, or retain shark bycatch, the precautionary principle must be taken into account, and management measures must ensure that all shark catches in the convention area are sustainable.

Until measures are in place to ensure that the targeted and incidental catch of sharks is sustainable, their capture with fishing gear should be avoided and they should be released alive whenever possible. Gear that increases the likelihood of shark catch, such as wire leaders and shark lines, should be prohibited, depleted species should be fully protected, and further research should be undertaken to determine the best means of avoiding shark catch.

**Prohibit the retention of silky sharks (*Carcharhinus falciformis*):** Silky sharks are commonly caught in all IOTC fisheries. Between 2009 and 2013 an average of 3,843 tons of silky shark were reported to the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) as landed annually, and the Scientific Committee has noted that maintaining or increasing effort will likely result in further declines in biomass, productivity, and catch per unit of effort (CPUE). At current effort levels, the stock status is at considerable risk. The IOTC Scientific Committee's report notes that "despite the lack of data, it is clear from the information that is available that silky shark abundance has declined significantly over recent decades." Of the ten most vulnerable shark species to purse seine and longline fishing gear, silky sharks ranked second and fourth respectively, as determined by the IOTC ecological risk assessment (ERA). According to the IUCN Red List, silky sharks are Near Threatened in the western and eastern Indian Ocean, as well as globally. As such, IOTC should prohibit the retention of all silky sharks.

**Prohibit the retention of hammerhead sharks (*Sphyrnidae*):** Hammerhead sharks are commonly caught as bycatch in longline and gillnet fisheries, and are targeted for their highly valued fins. Between 2009 and 2013 an average of 91 tons of scalloped hammerhead sharks were reported to the IOTC as landed annually, with the Scientific Committee noting the uncertainty of this figure due to the poor data provision on shark catches. The scalloped hammerhead is assessed by the IUCN Red List as Endangered in both the western Indian Ocean and globally. The FAO considers hammerheads to have an extremely low reproductive capacity and are one of the ocean's most vulnerable species. The Scientific Committee has noted that maintaining or increasing effort will likely result in further declines in biomass and productivity. The IOTC should establish measures to prohibit the retention of hammerhead sharks.

**Prohibit the retention of shortfin mako sharks (*Isurus oxyrinchus*):** Between 2009 and 2013 an average of 1,364 tons of shortfin mako sharks were reported to the IOTC as landed annually. According to the IUCN Red List, shortfin mako sharks are Vulnerable to extinction in the western and eastern Indian Ocean, as well as globally. The ecological risk assessment developed for sharks

in the Indian Ocean also identifies the shortfin mako as the most vulnerable shark to longline fisheries, and the third most vulnerable shark in purse seine fisheries. The IOTC should work to protect this vulnerable species by adopting measures to prohibit its retention.

### **Strengthen Controls Against Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing**

IOTC Members have the opportunity to reduce IUU fishing by effectively implementing current obligations and taking practical steps to improve existing requirements:

**Combat IUU fishing through greater transparency and accountability:** IOTC has taken important steps to improve compliance with its resolutions to combat IUU fishing. However, illegal practices continue. To effectively manage fisheries and have effective control measures, IOTC must require complete transparency from all members and accountability to existing commitments. To this end, it is essential that Members comply rigorously with their reporting obligations. A review of compliance tables submitted in 2014 indicates that at least a 30% of IOTC members fail to submit reports or submit incomplete reports on compliance with key measures, such as VMS requirements and port state measures. Members must not compromise the effectiveness of IOTC objectives and need to prioritize the provision of accurate and timely compliance and implementation reports.

**Enhance efforts to implement port state measures and ratify the FAO Port State Measures Agreement:** IOTC members and the Secretariat have taken important steps to effectively implement Resolution 10/11 on port State measures. Since their adoption, port state measures have started to prove to be a cost-effective tool to curb IUU fishing in the Indian Ocean. CPCs should continue their efforts to use port controls, and be encouraged to join others who are working to ratify the PSMA so that this Agreement can soon enter into force and reach its full potential in the fight against IUU fishing.

**Identify IOTC vessels with the IMO number:** Last year, the Commission made important strides toward improving the identification of fishing vessels by requiring International Maritime Organization (IMO) numbers for large vessels. The Secretariat has continued to improve the quality of the existing Record of Vessels also, in the context of the Consolidated List of Authorized Vessels (CLAV). In order to ensure compliance with Resolutions 14/04 and 14/05, CPCs must ensure that by 1 January 2016 all eligible vessels on the IOTC Records are duly identified with the IMO number.

**Effectively use VMS:** VMS is the most appropriate and commonly used tool to track authorized fishing vessels and to determine whether their activities are in compliance with management requirements, such as fishing authorizations, as well as whether they are fishing in permitted areas and during allowed seasons. As of 1 July 2007, all IOTC member States have been required to adopt a satellite-based vessel monitoring system for vessels greater than 15 meters in length overall which operate in the IOTC Area and which fish on the high seas for IOTC-covered species, with some exceptions permitted. More than seven years later, not all CPCs have fully implemented IOTC's minimum VMS requirements. Members should ensure that as of 2016 all CPCs are fully compliant with current VMS requirements, and should contemplate next steps to strengthen IOTC's VMS so it can respond to today's challenges in fisheries management.

**Support the FISH-i regional partnership in the Western Indian Ocean:** The FISH-i regional partnership is aimed at analyzing integrated intelligence information and preparing enforcement actions against IUU fishing operators in the Western Indian Ocean. A pilot project was started in December 2012 and FISH-i Africa was fully established in May 2014. IOTC members and the IOTC Secretariat should continue to support this important initiative.

**Ban transshipment at sea:** Transshipment at sea continues to be used in the IOTC Convention Area as a way to avoid proper catch reporting and to launder IUU caught fish. IOTC should ban transshipment at sea until it can be verified that these operations do not assist IUU fishing. This would require a robust monitoring system to guarantee full transparency.

**Keep the IUU vessel list up to date:** Placing a vessel on IOTC's IUU vessel list serves as an essential step in deterring unacceptable practices in the Convention Area. The list's effectiveness, however, is diminished because under current rules IUU vessels can only be added to the list once a year. That allows some IUU vessels to operate unhindered until action is taken by the Commission at its annual meeting. On the other hand, IOTC has established procedures that permit delisting of vessels from the list on an intersessional basis. Procedures should be established so that vessels can also be listed on an intersessional basis. In addition, IOTC should take steps to ensure that the IUU vessel list is monitored regularly and updated whenever a vessel changes name, flag, or other identifying feature.

**At a minimum, increase observer coverage to meet IOTC established requirements:** IOTC Resolution 11/04 requires observer coverage on at least 5% of operations/sets for each gear type by the fleet of each CPC while fishing in the IOTC area of competence for vessels 24 meters or longer, and on vessels under 24 meters if they fish outside their Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). However, the actual coverage levels necessary for robust management decisions are likely much higher than 5%.

Due to the low level of current observer coverage, the quality of data from many IOTC fisheries is poor and introduces much uncertainty into management decisions. CPCs should immediately increase observer coverage to levels consistent with Resolution 11/04. In addition, IOTC should conduct a review of what level of observer coverage is currently being achieved and what level is necessary to reduce uncertainty in management decisions.

### **Implement Catch Limits and Improve Gear Management for Tuna Species**

**Develop precautionary Harvest Strategies:** IOTC adopted Resolution 13/10 on Interim Target and Limit Reference Points and a Decision Framework in 2013. This is a critical first step towards the development of Harvest Strategies for IOTC fisheries, which will strengthen science-based fisheries management. When implemented properly, they should contribute both to the conservation of the stocks, and the stability and profitability of the fishery. However, Pew is concerned that by setting the target reference points, rather than the limits, at maximum sustainable yield, the IOTC interim reference points are inconsistent with the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement. Given that the albacore and yellowfin tuna populations may be subject to overfishing, the IOTC should act to strengthen the framework for Harvest Strategies, including by identifying more precautionary target and limit reference points for these species, as a matter of priority in 2015. The IOTC should also revise Resolution 13/10 to define "high probability" as greater than 75 percent likelihood and to require overfishing to be stopped immediately.

**Improve Fish Aggregating Device (FAD) management:** Currently, IOTC members fishing with FADs are required to submit management plans and information on FAD numbers (deployed, recovered, lost). Additional requirements, such as limits on the overall numbers of FADs, sharing of satellite tracking information with the Secretariat, and FAD collection policies will allow for near-real-time FAD management, improve future stock assessments and help to address their ecosystem impacts and marine litter resulting from uncontrolled drifting FAD use. They would also provide information to help address IUU fishing in the convention area. We recommend the Commission adopt the Scientific Committee's Terms of Reference for establishing a FAD working group, as a means to elucidating the environmental effects of FADs and inform management. The working group should consider the development of science-based limits, including limits on FAD sets and the number of FADs deployed.

*For further information, please visit: <http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/topics/international-policy>*