

## **INDIAN OCEAN TUNA COMMISSION (IOTC), VIRTUAL MEETING, NOVEMBER 2-6, 2020**

The impacts of COVID-19 have presented challenges to regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs) in conducting meetings in 2020. The Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) cancelled its in-person Commission and Working Party meetings. These meetings will be taking place virtually.

Even under these challenging circumstances, IOTC must ensure the uninterrupted, sustainable management of the tuna stocks and marine ecosystems under its purview. In particular, there are several critical measures and issues that require immediate attention by IOTC this year.

This Statement focuses on those critical measures and issues on which IOTC must take action in 2020 or advance work in 2021, which align with the ISSF global priorities for tuna RFMOs.

### **Tuna Conservation & Management**

#### **What are the issues?**

Yellowfin tuna remains overfished and subject to overfishing and its catches continue to increase despite the recovery plan and catch reductions agreed in Resolution 19/01. The catches of skipjack tuna continue to increase and are 30 % higher than the agreed harvest control rule. Bigeye and albacore stocks are subject to overfishing. There are no complete management procedures in place for any key IOTC species.

#### **Why are we concerned?**

Non-compliance with Resolution 19/01 for an interim rebuilding plan for the Indian Ocean yellowfin tuna stock is likely resulting in a yellowfin catch increase. Moreover, the rebuilding plan adopted in Resolution 19/01 allows for growth in some fishery sectors and did not give full effect to the advice of the IOTC Scientific Committee. Skipjack catches were 30% higher than the agreed annual quota. Thus, considering all the above, ISSF remains concerned of further possible declines in the yellowfin and skipjack stocks. ISSF also remains worried about continued inaction to arrest the overfishing of other key IOTC species such as bigeye, albacore, some neritic tuna and billfish species that have been assessed to be overfished and/or undergoing overfishing. These IOTC fisheries will experience further declines in stock status if no management actions are agreed.

### **Our Top Asks for IOTC in 2020/2021:**

1. Given the serious risk of further declines in the status of the yellowfin stock, adopt without delay in 2020 an effective rebuilding plan for yellowfin tuna that gives full effect to the advice of the IOTC Scientific Committee; and address over-catches in contravention of Res. 19/01.
2. Urgently monitor and manage catches of skipjack to ensure catches in 2020/2021 do not exceed the limit set by the adopted Harvest Control Rule in Resolution 16/02.
3. Conduct MSE for albacore, bigeye, skipjack and yellowfin tuna stocks and adopt species-specific management procedures, particularly for yellowfin tuna, in 2021.
4. Request the Scientific Committee to provide science-based limits on FAD deployments and/or FAD sets; and develop in 2021 and adopt, by 2022, FAD marking guidelines, including the requirement to mark both the buoy and the FAD structure.
5. Develop and adopt minimum standards for EMS and an e-reporting information system both for logbooks and observers for all gears in 2021 so that large-scale purse seine vessels, and all vessels engaged in at-sea transshipment, regardless of gear type, are required to have 100% observer coverage within five years.

## What is ISSF asking IOTC to do?

(1) Given the serious risk of further declines in the status of the yellowfin stock, adopt without delay in 2020 an effective rebuilding plan for yellowfin tuna that gives full effect to the advice of the 2015 IOTC Scientific Committee and achieves spawning stock biomass capable of producing MSY ( $SSB_{MSY}$ ) by 2027 with at least 50% probability, ensuring all gears/fleets harvesting yellowfin are taken into account to improve rebuilding potential of Resolution 19/01. If implemented effectively, this would imply a 15%-20% reduction from the 2017 yellowfin catch levels. In addition, IOTC needs to address over-catches in contravention of Res. 19/01.

(2) Ensure Contracting Party and Cooperating Non-Contracting Party (CPC) compliance with the rebuilding plan through the IOTC Compliance Committee.

(3) Urgently monitor and manage catches of skipjack to ensure catches in 2020/2021 do not exceed the limit set by the adopted Harvest Control Rule in Resolution 16/02.

## Management Procedures (Harvest Strategies)

### What are the issues?

Management Procedures (also called Harvest Strategies) — which include target and limit reference points together with harvest control rules— provide pre-agreed rules acting on stock status changes for managing fisheries resources.

### Why are we concerned?

Although the IOTC has been slowly progressing the development of management procedures, it has not yet agreed on a complete management procedure for any of the key IOTC species.

## What is ISSF asking IOTC to do?

(1) Act on the Technical Committee on Management Procedures' (TCMP) and Commission 2017 workplan on the adoption of management procedures, and assist developing CPCs to support their participation in this work.

(2) Conduct Management Strategy Evaluations (MSE) for albacore, bigeye, skipjack and yellowfin tuna stocks.

(3) Adopt species-specific management procedures, particularly for yellowfin tuna, that follow the decision framework of Resolution 15/10, achieve targets, and avoid breaching limits consistent with the best available scientific advice and level of uncertainty in the stock assessments in 2021.

## FAD and Supply Vessel Management

### What are the issues?

Fish aggregating devices (FAD) sets account for nearly 31% of tropical tuna catches and 39% of skipjack catches in the Indian Ocean. The collection of data on FAD type, usage, and the catch associated with a set supports improved understanding of changes in fishing capacity, likely impacts on IOTC stocks and the development of science-based FAD management measures.

### Why are we concerned?

In the Indian Ocean, a concerted effort is needed to better monitor FAD usage and to support the adoption of science-based FAD related management measures. In the IO, shark and non-target species bycatch and other ecosystem impacts, such as marine debris and FAD beaching, need to be reduced; using non-entangling and biodegradable FAD designs is a critical step to achieving that.

## What is ISSF asking IOTC to do?

(1) Request the Scientific Committee to provide science-based limits on FAD deployments and/or FAD sets.

- (2) Develop in 2021 and adopt, by 2022, FAD marking guidelines, including the requirement to mark both the buoy and the FAD structure, and FAD tracking and recovery policies, as called for in Res.19/02.
- (3) Reactivate the IOTC FAD Working Group established by Res. 15/09 to address the tasks assigned to it in Res. 19/02.
- (4) Using mandatory data collected by CPCs in accordance with Resolutions 15/01, 15/02, and 19/02, ensure compliance with FAD data reporting and limits.

## Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS)

### OBSERVER COVERAGE AND ELECTRONIC MONITORING

#### What are the issues?

Comprehensive observer coverage is critical to effective fisheries management, compliance monitoring, and independent verification of catch, effort and species interactions (e.g., sharks, sea turtles, and cetaceans).

#### Why are we concerned?

The IOTC has failed to take account of best practices for observer coverage for longline, purse seine and other gear types. Resolution 11/04 only requires 5% observer coverage irrespective of the gear and/or area of operation. The IOTC lags far behind other RFMOs observer coverage rates, particularly for longline and large-scale purse seine fleets. Observer coverage must be increased to strengthen data collection, including of rare species interactions and events, and to ensure rigorous compliance monitoring. While the IOTC has endorsed minimum electronic monitoring (EM) standards for purse seine vessels, the Commission has not adopted them for all gear types or carrier vessels.

#### What is ISSF asking IOTC to do?

- (1) Apply the minimum Regional Observer Scheme Standards adopted by the Commission in 2019, including related to observer training, to all national observer programs operating in the IOTC.
- (2) Amend Resolution 11/04 to increase the minimum observer coverage levels for large-scale purse seine vessels, and all vessels engaged in at-sea transshipment, regardless of gear type, to 100% within five years.
- (3) Develop and adopt minimum standards for EMS and an e-reporting information system both for logbooks and observers ([e-Maris](#)) for all gears in 2021.

## Compliance Processes

#### What are the issues?

A strong compliance process improves fisheries management by holding CPCs accountable.

#### Why are we concerned?

IOTC Compliance Committee reports indicate there is significant CPC non-compliance and gaps in implementation with a range of IOTC measures, which reduces the effectiveness of IOTC conservation and management measures and the IOTC.

#### What is ISSF asking IOTC to do?

That the IOTC Compliance Committee, in conducting its work by correspondence:

- (1) Recommend that CPCs submit a compliance action plan, such as those from Compliance Missions, that addresses identified areas of non-compliance and outlines a plan for improvements.
- (2) Adopt a workplan to develop a scheme of responses to non-compliance.

## ISSF Global Priorities for Tuna RFMOs

Implementation of rigorous management procedures, including harvest control rules and reference points

Effective management of fleet capacity, including developing mechanisms that support developing coastal state engagement in the fishery

Science-based FAD management & non-entangling and biodegradable FAD designs

Increased member compliance with all measures adopted, and greater transparency of processes reviewing member compliance with measures

Strengthened Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS) measures and increased observer coverage, including through modern technologies such as electronic monitoring and e-reporting

Adoption of best-practice bycatch mitigation and shark conservation and management measures

### Did you know?

50% of the IOTC tuna catch is landed by small scale and artisanal fleets.

Unfortunately, IOTC lags other RFMOs on data collection and reporting as well as on requiring 100% purse seine observer coverage.

ISSF is leading research on biodegradable FADs in the IO in collaboration with IO fleets, IOTC member countries, coastal nations, and other stakeholders.

ISSF also offers [guidelines for implementing non-entangling and biodegradable FADs](#).

Three [ISSF conservation measures](#) focus on shark bycatch mitigation.



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