

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: FRIGATE TUNA (2021)

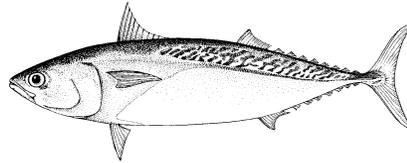


Table 1. Status of frigate tuna (*Auxis thazard*) in the Indian Ocean

Area ¹	Indicators		2021 stock status determination
Indian Ocean	Catch 2020 ² (t)	98,875	
	Average catch 2016–2020 (t)	98,017	
	MSY (1,000 t) (80% CI)	unknown	
	F _{MSY} (80% CI)	unknown	
	B _{MSY} (1,000 t) (80% CI)	unknown	
	F _{current} /F _{MSY} (80% CI)	unknown	
B _{current} /B _{MSY} (80% CI)	unknown		
	B _{current} /B ₀ (80% CI)	unknown	

¹ Boundaries for the Indian Ocean stock assessment are defined as the IOTC area of competence

² Proportion of 2020 catch fully or partially estimated by IOTC Secretariat: 64.3%

Colour key	Stock overfished ($SB_{year}/SB_{MSY} < 1$)	Stock not overfished ($SB_{year}/SB_{MSY} \geq 1$)
Stock subject to overfishing ($F_{year}/F_{MSY} > 1$)		
Stock not subject to overfishing ($F_{year}/F_{MSY} \leq 1$)		
Not assessed/Uncertain		

INDIAN OCEAN STOCK – MANAGEMENT ADVICE

Stock status. A new assessment was carried out in 2021 using the data-limited techniques (CMSY and LB-SPR), however the catch data for frigate tuna are very uncertain given the high percentage of the catches that had to be estimated due to a range of reporting issues. Due to a lack of fishery data for several gears, only preliminary stock status indicators can be used. The lack of data on which to base an assessment of the stock is a cause for considerable concern. Stock status in relation to the Commission's B_{MSY} and F_{MSY} reference points remains **unknown** (Table 1).

Outlook. Estimated catches have increased steadily since the late-1970s, reaching around 30,000 t in the late-1980s, to between 51,000 and 58,000 t by the mid-1990s, and steadily increasing to over 90,000 t in the following ten years. Between 2010 and 2014 catches have increased to over 105,000 t, rising to the highest levels recorded; although catches have since decline marginally to between 90,000 – 102,000 t since 2014. There is insufficient information to evaluate the effect that this level of catch or a further increase in catches may have on the resource. Research emphasis should be focused on collating catch per unit effort (CPUE) time series for the main fleets, size compositions and life trait history parameters (e.g., estimates of growth, natural mortality, maturity, etc.).

Management advice. For assessed species of neritic tunas in Indian Ocean (longtail tuna, kawakawa and narrow-barred Spanish mackerel), the MSY was estimated to have been reached between 2009 and 2011 and both F_{MSY} and B_{MSY} were breached thereafter. Therefore, in the absence of a stock assessment of frigate tuna a limit to the catches should be considered by the Commission, by ensuring that future catches do not exceed the average catches estimated between 2009 and 2011 (101,260 t). The reference period (2009-2011) was chosen based on the most recent assessments of those neritic species in the Indian Ocean for which an assessment is available under the assumption that also for frigate tuna MSY was reached between 2009 and 2011. This catch advice should be maintained until an assessment of frigate tuna is available. Considering that MSY-based reference points for assessed species can change over time, the stock should be

closely monitored. Mechanisms need to be developed by the Commission to improve current statistics by encouraging CPCs to comply with their recording and reporting requirements, so as to better inform scientific advice.

The following should be also noted:

- The Maximum Sustainable Yield estimate for the Indian Ocean stock is unknown (Management advice is based on a proxy from the 3 assessed species).
- **Limit reference points:** The Commission has not adopted limit reference points for any of the neritic tunas under its mandate.
- Further work is needed to improve the reliability of the catch series, such as verification or estimation based on expert knowledge of the history of the various fisheries or through statistical extrapolation methods.
- Research emphasis should be focused on collating catch per unit effort (CPUE) time series for the main fleets, size compositions and life trait history parameters (e.g., estimates of growth, natural mortality, maturity, etc.).
- Species identification, data collection and reporting urgently need to be improved.
- There is limited information submitted by CPCs on total catches, catch and effort and size data for neritic tunas, despite their mandatory reporting status. In the case of 2020 catches (reference year 2019), 40% of the total catches were either fully or partially estimated by the IOTC Secretariat, which increases the uncertainty of the stock assessments using these data. Therefore, the management advice to the Commission includes the need for CPCs to comply with IOTC data requirements per Resolution 15/01 and 15/02.
- **Main fisheries (mean annual catch 2016-2020):** frigate tuna is mainly caught using gillnets (~40%), coastal longline and trolling, handlines and trolling (~32%), and to a lesser extent coastal purse seine nets (15%)
- **Main fleets (mean annual catch 2016-2020):** catches of frigate tuna are highly concentrated, with 90% of catches accounted for by four countries in recent years: Indonesia (57.5%), Pakistan (12.8%), I.R. Iran (10.4%) and India (7.9%).

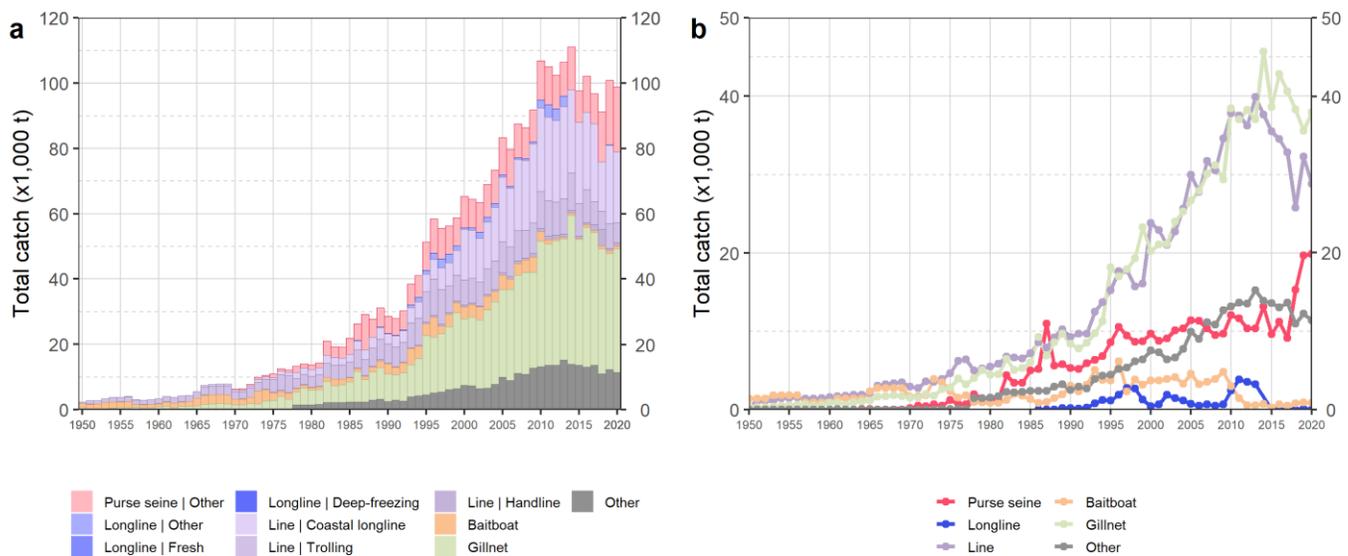


Fig. 1. Annual time series of (a) cumulative nominal catch (t) by fishery and (b) individual nominal catch (t) by fishery group for frigate tuna during 1950–2020. Longline | Other: swordfish and sharks-targeted longlines; Other: all remaining fishing gears