



Status of the Indian Ocean pelagic thresher shark (PTH: *Alopias pelagicus*)

TABLE 1. Pelagic thresher shark: Status pelagic thresher shark (*Alopias pelagicus*) in the Indian Ocean.

Area ¹	Indicators	2018 stock status determination
Indian Ocean	Reported catch 2017: Not elsewhere included (nei) sharks 2017: Average reported catch 2013-17: Av. not elsewhere included (nei) sharks ² 2013-17:	0 t 56,883 t 0 t 51,712 t
	MSY (1,000 t) (80% CI): F _{MSY} (80% CI): SB _{MSY} (1,000 t) (80% CI): F _{current} /F _{MSY} (80% CI): SB _{current} /SB _{MSY} (80% CI): SB _{current} /SB ₀ (80% CI):	unknown

¹Boundaries for the Indian Ocean = IOTC area of competence

²Includes all other shark catches reported to the IOTC Secretariat, which may contain this species (i.e., SHK: sharks various nei; RSK: requiem sharks nei).

Colour key	Stock overfished (SB _{year} /SB _{MSY} < 1)	Stock not overfished (SB _{year} /SB _{MSY} ≥ 1)
Stock subject to overfishing (F _{year} /F _{MSY} > 1)		
Stock not subject to overfishing (F _{year} /F _{MSY} ≤ 1)		
Not assessed/Uncertain		

TABLE 2. Pelagic thresher shark: IUCN threat status of pelagic thresher shark (*Alopias pelagicus*) in the Indian Ocean.

Common name	Scientific name	IUCN threat status ³		
		Global status	WIO	EIO
Pelagic thresher shark	<i>Alopias pelagicus</i>	Vulnerable	–	–

IUCN = International Union for Conservation of Nature; WIO = Western Indian Ocean; EIO = Eastern Indian Ocean

³The process of the threat assessment from IUCN is independent from the IOTC and is presented for information purpose only

Sources: IUCN 2007, Reardon et al. 2009

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Stock status. There remains considerable uncertainty in the stock status due to lack of information necessary for assessment or for the development of other indicators (Table 1). The ecological risk assessment (ERA) conducted for the Indian Ocean by the WPEB and SC in 2018¹ consisted of a semi-quantitative analysis to evaluate the resilience of shark species to the impact of a given fishery, by combining the biological productivity of the species and susceptibility to each fishing gear type. Pelagic thresher shark received a medium vulnerability ranking (No. 12) in the ERA for longline gear because it was characterised as one of the least productive shark species, and with a medium susceptibility to longline gear. Due to its low productivity, pelagic thresher shark has a high vulnerability ranking (No. 2) to purse seine gear due to its high availability for this particular gear. The current IUCN threat status of ‘Vulnerable’ applies to pelagic thresher shark globally (Table 2). There is a paucity of information available on this species and this situation is not expected to improve in the short to medium term. Pelagic thresher sharks are commonly taken by a range of fisheries in the Indian Ocean. Because of their life history characteristics – they are relatively long lived (+ 20 years), mature at 8–9 years, and have few offspring (2 pups every year) - the pelagic thresher shark is vulnerable to overfishing. There is no quantitative stock assessment and limited basic fishery indicators are currently available for pelagic thresher shark in the Indian Ocean. Therefore the stock status is **unknown**.

Outlook. Current longline fishing effort is directed at other species, however, pelagic thresher sharks are commonly taken as bycatch in these fisheries. Hooking mortality is apparently very high, therefore IOTC Resolution 12/09 prohibiting retaining of any part of thresher sharks onboard and promoting life release of thresher shark may be largely ineffective for species conservation. Maintaining or increasing effort can result in declines in biomass, productivity and CPUE. However there are few data to estimate CPUE trends, and a reluctance of fishing fleets to report information on discards/non-retained catch. Piracy in the western Indian Ocean resulted in the displacement and subsequent concentration of a substantial portion of longline fishing effort into other areas in the southern and eastern Indian Ocean. Some longline vessels have returned to their traditional fishing areas in the northwest Indian Ocean, due to the increased security onboard vessels, with the exception of the Japanese fleet which has still not returned to the levels seen before the start of the piracy threat. It is therefore unlikely that catch and effort on pelagic thresher shark declined in the southern and eastern areas over that time period, potentially resulting in localised depletion there.

Management advice. The prohibition on the retention of pelagic thresher shark should be maintained. While mechanisms exist for encouraging CPCs to comply with their recording and reporting requirements (Resolution 18/07), these need to be further implemented by the Commission, so as to better inform scientific advice. IOTC Resolution 12/09 *On the conservation of thresher sharks (family Alopiidae) caught in association with fisheries in the IOTC area of competence*, prohibits retention onboard, transshipping, landing, storing, selling or offering for sale any part or whole carcass of thresher sharks of all the species of the family Alopiidae².

The following key points should also be noted:

- **Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY):** Not applicable. Retention prohibited.
- **Reference points:** Not applicable.
- **Main fishing gear (2013-17):** ~~Gillnet-longline; longline-gillnet.~~
- **Main fleets (2013-17):** Sri Lanka (reported as discarded/released alive: Japan, Korea, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Indonesia).

LITERATURE CITED

Murua H, Santiago, J, Coelho, R, Zudaire I, Neves C, Rosa D, Semba Y, Geng Z, Bach P, Arrizabalaga, H., Baez JC, Ramos ML, Zhu JF and Ruiz J. (2018). Updated Ecological Risk Assessment (ERA) for shark species caught in fisheries managed by the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC). IOTC–2018–SC21–14_Rev_1.

²Scientific observers shall be allowed to collect biological samples from thresher sharks that are dead at haulback, provided that the samples are part of the research project approved by the Scientific Committee (or the Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch).