

INDIAN OCEAN TUNA COMMISSION (IOTC), COMMISSION MEETING, MAY 16-20, 2022

The impacts of COVID-19 continue to present challenges to regional fisheries management organizations in conducting meetings. Even under these challenging circumstances, IOTC must ensure the uninterrupted, sustainable management of the tuna stocks and marine ecosystems under its purview. 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 2022, 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 since 2016. The catches of skipjack tuna have been higher than the agreed catch limit of the harvest control rule for 2018-2020. 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?

Nearly 40% of the catches of yellowfin tuna in 2020 and projected for 2022 are by CPCs that objected to Resolution 21/01. While some CPCs/gear groups bound by the previous Resolution have made the required reductions, others have increased their catches since the rebuilding plan was first adopted (e.g., one CPC has doubled its yellowfin catches from 2019 to 2020), and there has been lack of compliance with previous yellowfin rebuilding plans by many CPCs (Res. 18/01 and Res. 19/01). The IOTC Scientific Committee presented new management advice and probabilities to recover the yellowfin stock in 2021 which suggested that the stock would recover to SSB_{MSY} by 2030 (around 2 generation times) with a 50% probability if catches are reduced by **at least 22 %** (i.e., down to 336,145 tons) relative to the 2020 catch level (430,956 tons). Larger catch reductions could allow the stock to recover with a greater probability. For example, a 30% reduction (i.e., down to 301,669 tons) relative to the 2020 catch level (430,956 tons) would have a 67% probability that the stock would recover to SSB_{MSY} by 2030. The yellowfin stock is likely to experience further declines in stock status if new science-based and enforceable management actions are not agreed at the Commission Meeting in May.

Skipjack catches in 2020 (555,211 tons) were higher than the agreed annual catch limit for 2020 (470,029 tons) and the new catch limit for 2021-2023 (513,572 tons). The IOTC needs to ensure that catches of skipjack tuna during 2021-2023 do not exceed the agreed limit. IOTC needs to act to arrest the overfishing of other key species such as bigeye and albacore, and some neritic tuna and billfish

Our Top Asks for 2022:

1. Adopt revisions to Res. 21/01 to ensure the effective rebuilding of yellowfin tuna by reducing catches by **at least 22%** relative to the 2020 catch level; and address over-catches in contravention of Resolutions 21/01, 18/01 and 19/01.
2. Ensure that catches of skipjack in 2022 do not exceed the limit set by the adopted Harvest Control Rule (513,572 tons).
3. Adopt a bigeye tuna management procedure and agree on permanent Limit and Target Reference Points for tropical and temperate tunas, particularly yellowfin.
4. Strengthen FAD management measures.
5. Endorse the terms of references and workplan developed by the IOTC ad-hoc Working Group and accelerate work on the EM Program Standards.
6. Amend Resolution 17/05 to require fins naturally attached for sharks, irrespective of how they are landed.

species that have been assessed to be overfished and/or undergoing overfishing.

What is ISSF asking IOTC to do?

- (1) Adopt without delay in amendments to Resolution 21/01 to ensure an effective rebuilding plan for yellowfin tuna that gives full effect to the advice of the IOTC Scientific Committee, which, if implemented effectively, would recover the stock to SSB_{MSY} by 2030 (around 2 generation times) with 50% probability if catches are reduced by **at least 22 %** (i.e., down to 336,145 tons) relative to the 2020 catch level (430,956 tons).
- (2) Ensure CPC compliance with the rebuilding plan and address over-catches in contravention of Res. 18/01 and 19/01 through the IOTC Compliance Committee.
- (3) Ensure that catches of skipjack in 2022 do not exceed the limit set by the adopted Harvest Control Rule in Res. 21/02 (513,572 t.).
- (4) Ensure CPC compliance with the prohibition on the use of large-scale driftnets on the high seas and urge accelerated implementation of Res. 17/07 that prohibits the use of such driftnets in the entire IOTC area of competence.

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) Accelerate action on developing comprehensive, precautionary Management Procedures, adopt a bigeye tuna management procedure and agree on permanent Limit and Target Reference Points for tropical and temperate tunas, particularly yellowfin.
- (2) Conduct Management Strategy Evaluations (MSE) for albacore, skipjack and yellowfin tuna stocks.

FAD and Supply Vessel Management

What are the issues?

Fish aggregating devices (FAD) sets accounted for nearly 35% of tropical tuna catches and 45% of skipjack catches in the Indian Ocean in 2016-2020. The collection of data on FAD type, usage, and the catch associated with a FAD set supports improved understanding of changes in fishing capacity, likely impacts on IOTC stocks and the development of science-based FAD management measures. While supply vessels increase the availability of FADs to fishing vessels, they can also become an integral part of FAD recovery programs.

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) Develop and implement science-based limits on FAD deployments and/or FAD sets consistent with management objectives for the tropical tunas.
- (2) Allow for the use by the IOTC Scientific Committee of FAD tracking data submitted for compliance purposes (per Res. 19-02).
- (3) Require the use of biodegradable materials in the construction of FADs to minimize use of synthetic/plastic materials in FAD construction and establish a timeline for transitioning to 100% biodegradable.

(4) Develop in 2022 and adopt, by 2023, FAD marking guidelines, including requiring the marking of the buoy and the FAD structure; FAD tracking and recovery policies, as called for in Res.19/02, that consider utilizing supply vessels in FAD recovery efforts; and clearer rules for FAD ownership and activation and deactivation of FAD buoys.

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 lags far behind other RFMOs observer coverage rates. Resolution 11/04 only requires 5% observer coverage irrespective of the gear and/or area of operation. 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, it has not yet adopted them formally in a resolution for all gear types or carrier vessels.

What is ISSF asking IOTC to do?

- (1) Endorse the terms of references and workplan developed by the IOTC ad-hoc Working Group and accelerate work on the EM Program Standards so that these program minimum standards are adopted in 2023.
- (2) Require 100% observer coverage (human and/or electronic) in industrial tuna fisheries, including supply vessels and all those engaged in at sea transshipment, by 2024.
- (3) Adopt a binding measure that will ensure the safety of human observers, including those on supply and carrier vessels

TRANSSHIPMENT

What are the issues?

To better manage transshipment and combat Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing activities, deficiencies and loopholes must be addressed in the [IOTC's Resolution 21/02](#) on transshipment.

Why are we concerned?

At-sea transshipment has been linked to IUU fishing activities and labor abuses when monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) measures are insufficient. At-sea transshipment continues to expand in the IOTC. Since 2015, at-sea transshipments have more than doubled (from 726 to 1615 in 2020). In 2020 the number of transshipments was the highest on record. Due to the pandemic, in 2020 75% of these transshipment events were unobserved.

What is ISSF asking IOTC to do?

Amend the IOTC at-sea transshipment Resolution 21/02 to:

- (a) Require authorized carrier vessels to be flagged to IOTC CPCs or CNCPs.
- (b) Require that all reporting is undertaken electronically and in near real-time, but no greater than 24 hours after the event, and all transshipment declarations are submitted to both the flag State and the IOTC Secretariat
- (c) Require that all vessels authorized to conduct at-sea transshipment have an IMO number; have operational VMS and AIS systems; and that VMS position data are provided to the relevant RFMO Secretariat in near-real time.

VMS AND PORT STATE MEASURES

What are the issues?

Fisheries management relies on the adoption and implementation of effective MCS tools to detect non-compliance and IUU fishing. MCS tools include technologies and programs such as satellite Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS) and port monitoring.

Why are we concerned?

IOTC's current VMS program is not centralized, and compliance with the existing requirements is low. The IOTC formed a VMS Working Group to provide advice on a future IOTC Commission VMS, which recently met in January 2022. IOTC's Resolution on Port State Measures (16/11) is not aligned with the FAO Agreement on Port State Measures in several key areas, which undermines its effectiveness.

What is ISSF asking IOTC to do?

- (1) Consider the recommendations of the VMS Working Group, the VMS Consultancy and VMS Steering Committee and adopt amendments to Res. 15/03 that strengthen the IOTC VMS, including options for simultaneous near real time position reporting and ensuring systems are tamper-proof.
- (2) Amend Res. 16/11 to prioritize vessels for inspection in port and expand the measure to include ports of CPCs that are outside of the IOTC Convention Area.

Bycatch and Sharks

What are the issues?

Science-based conservation and management measures to limit fishing mortality on non-target species such as sharks, turtles and seabirds, must be adopted and implemented. Data collection and reporting is essential to support the adoption of bycatch mitigation measures based on the best available science and the precautionary approach. The paucity of data on shark catches and interactions with non-target species prevents assessments and hinders the provision of scientific advice and effective management.

Why are we concerned?

Even with the limited data on sharks available, it is clear that the abundance of some species is declining. While the IOTC does not have a clear mandate to manage shark fisheries, it must take action to mitigate the impact of tuna fisheries on shark populations. In addition, the IOTC Resolutions on sea turtles and seabird conservation are outdated and do not include known mitigation techniques.

What is ISSF asking IOTC to do?

- (1) Adopt sufficient measures to limit fishing mortality on sharks, as recommended by the IOTC Scientific Committee.
- (2) Amend Resolution 17/05 to require fins naturally attached for all sharks, irrespective of how they are landed.
- (3) Amend Resolution 12/04 on turtle conservation and amend Resolution 12/06 on seabird conservation, as previously recommended by the Scientific Committee, to include scientifically proven mitigation measures and devices, require identification to species level, and improve the minimum observer data requirements.
- (4) Adopt Best Practices for the Safe Release of Sharks, including the use of safe release devices, like the WCPFC and IATTC.

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 significant CPC non-compliance and gaps in implementation with a range of IOTC measures, which reduces the effectiveness of IOTC conservation and management measures.

What is ISSF asking IOTC to do?

- (1) Require 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 improvement.
- (2) Adopt a workplan to develop a scheme of responses to non-compliance.
- (3) 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 and ensure that the FAD data collected are made available to the Scientific Committee.

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, including requiring all sharks be landed with fins naturally attached

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](#).

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

Two [ISSF conservation measures](#) focus on FAD management.



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