



Treatment of Supply & Tender Vessels

What Are Supply and Tender Vessels?

Supply vessels are used in many oceans by purse seine vessels fishing with drifting fish aggregating devices (dFADs). These supply vessels range from 40 to 50 meters in length and are operated by a crew of around six persons. These vessels can be refurbished from other fisheries or be built specifically to serve as dFAD maintenance boats with deck characteristics designed to manipulate dFADs. The primary use of a supply vessel is for maintaining a purse seine vessel's network of dFADs at sea in good condition and in the appropriate areas.

Currently three of the four tuna regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs) allow for the use of supply vessels, but the degree of regulation and data collection on such vessels varies. All tuna RFMOs have made significant improvements in the management of drifting FADs, including the management of support vessels, in recent years (in 3 of the 4 tropical tuna RFMOs, supply and tender vessels are used by fleets engaged in the dFAD fishery). See the [RFMO Best Practices Snapshot: FAD Management](#) for more information. Exercising control over vessels engaged in fishing activities at sea — including authorization, monitoring, control and surveillance and data collection — are fundamental obligations of flag States as prescribed in the 1995 UN Fish Stocks Agreement (Article 18) and the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (Article 8).

Benefits of Supply and Tender Vessels

Supply vessel activities related to dFAD network maintenance increase the efficiency of the purse seiner, reducing the time needed by the purse seiner to search for or maintain dFADs, which increases the time available for fishing and therefore improves fishing effort efficiency. Supply vessels also help with performance and logistics, by navigating to port for food, water, equipment or oil for purse seiners. They also help with activities related to the exchange of crew and taking fishermen to port in case of illness. Navigation and travel costs of supply vessels are lower compared to those of the purse seiner, so there are economic efficiencies with their use (e.g., reduced fuel consumption and a lower carbon footprint).

How Do They Work?

The main task of the supply vessel is maintaining a purse seine vessel's network of dFADs at sea in good condition and in the appropriate areas. This includes seeding or deploying dFADs, replacing the structure of old or damaged dFADs and geo-locating buoy if needed, moving dFADs from areas that are not productive to areas where fishing may be better, and retrieving dFADs from areas far from the authorized fishing zone. While visiting dFAD networks, supply vessels also inform purse seiners about the presence of fish by estimating the abundance of fish using acoustic instruments onboard, sampling using trolling or hand-line fishing gears and/or through visual observations.



Treatment of Supply & Tender Vessels by RFMO

Recommended Best Practices

The following table shows the progress of each tuna RFMO in implementing the recommended best practices.











Color Coding Key

	Element(s) are consistent with the suggested best practices.		Some element(s) are present, but amendments or a change in procedure is needed to be consistent with best practices.		Element(s) are missing or inconsistent with best practices.
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RFMO	Definitions and Authorized Vessel Register			Data Collection and Use						MCS Requirements	
	RFMOs define that the activities of supply and tender vessels constitute “fishing” and that supply vessels are “fishing vessels”	Required to be on the RFMO authorized register of fishing vessels (RFV) and have an IMO/LR #	RFV should identify the activities supply and tender vessels are engaged in (e.g., working as bait boats, servicing or seeding FADs, etc.)	Collect data on the number and use of supply and tender vessels	Identify which purse seine vessels each supply and tender vessel supports	Collect the number of FADs being deployed and serviced by supply and tender vessels	Collect the time spent by supply and tender vessels in FAD fishing related activities, among other data elements, and including information on FAD characteristics	Supply and tender vessels included in FAD management measures	Limits number of supply and tender vessels	Observers (human or electronic) are required	VMS is required & position reports provided to the RFMO in near real time
WCPFC											
	 (Art 1(d)(vi) of the Convention)	 (CMM 2018-06)		 See footnote 1				 Included in FAD closures for EEZs an high seas (CMM 2023-01)		 Observer coverage does not explicitly apply, but could depending on how definition of “fishing” is applied	 (CMM 2014-02)

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¹ Supply vessels are not explicitly included in the WCPFC provision of scientific data documentation.

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IOTC ²	See footnote 2	 (Res 19/04)		 (Res 24/02)	 (Res 24/02)	 (Res 24/02)	 (Res 24/02 & 15/02)	 (Res 24/02)	 (Res 24/02)	 Observer coverage does not explicitly apply, but could depending on how definition of “fishing” is applied	 (Res 15/03)
IATTC ³	See footnote 3										

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² The Agreement for the Establishment of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission does not include definitions of “fishing” or “fishing vessels”. However, some in force IOTC Resolutions do, by their terms, define “fishing vessels” to include auxiliary, supply and support vessels.

³ In 1999, the IATTC adopted Resolution C-99-07 on Fish-Aggregating Devices that **prohibits the use of tender vessels** operating in support of vessels fishing on FADs in the Eastern Pacific Ocean, without prejudice to similar activities in other parts of the world. This Resolution is still active and is included in the compliance questionnaire that CPCs are to complete annually for review during the meeting of the Committee for the Review of Implementation of the Measures Adopted by the Commission. In 2024, IATTC adopted C-24-06 that continues this prohibition of the use of tender vessel operating in support of fishing on FADs in the Eastern Tropical Pacific. However, the Resolution does allow for their use in dFAD recovery programs under specific conditions.

RFMO	Definitions and Authorized Vessel Register			Data Collection and Use					MCS Requirements		
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ICCAT ⁴	See footnote 4	✓ (Rec. 13-13)	✗	✓ (Rec. 24-01)	✗	✓ (Rec. 24-01)	✓ (Rec. 24-01)	✓ (Rec. 24-01)	✗	✗	✓ Provision of position reports to RFMO (Rec. 18-10)



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⁴ The International Convention for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas does not include definitions of "fishing" or "fishing vessels." However, some ICCAT Recommendations do, by their terms, define "large-scale fishing vessels" or "commercial fishing vessels" or "fishing vessels" such that they include supply vessels. And, the use of the terms "operate" and "authorized to fish," as opposed to "fishing," could be interpreted to and, in fact, may extend some measures to supply vessels.