

## Recommendation n° 39

### **Consistent management of fish aggregating devices in International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna and Indian Ocean Tuna Commission**

The increasing use of fish aggregating devices (FADs) to optimize catches of tropical tunas (bigeye - *Thunnus obesus*, skipjack - *Katsuwonus pelamis* and yellowfin - *Thunnus albacares*) is spreading across the world's oceans. The proliferation of this fishing gear, allied to technological advances, is a global challenge to sustainable tuna fisheries. The catches of yellowfin and bigeye tuna around FADs, can represent over 95% of juveniles, while drifting FADs (dFADs) also increase the bycatches and ghost fishing of vulnerable species, damaging and contaminating marine ecosystems and interfering with other marine activities. This issue, along with a relative lack of transparency in the use of FADs, has been put into question the sustainability and legality of the current use of FADs, due, in a major part, to the lack of responsibility of the owners of dFADs, for the environmental damage and pollution they cause.

We congratulate the measures adopted at the sixth Special Session of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) to improve the management of anchored FADs and dFADs. The proposal for dFADs, presented by 11 Indian Ocean coastal states, includes measures aligned with those in the Atlantic Ocean, such as a gradual reduction of the number of dFADs allowed per vessel, from 300 to 250 in the first year, and a new reduction to 200 in 2025 (currently, FADs licenses in the Atlantic are 300 per vessel) and a closure of dFADs in 72 days, that can be adjusted by scientific advice once available. This recently adopted IOTC Resolution also includes measures that do not currently apply in the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna (ICCAT), such as the **register of dFADs** and the creation of an **independent dFAD monitoring system** to improve transparency and control.

Since the Outermost Regions represent communities that intrinsically depend on ocean resources through artisanal tuna fishing, we are optimistic about the European Union's capability to adequately protect the rights and needs of its artisanal fishing sector, in accordance with the many juridical instruments and agreements that already exist to support this cause.

Although, a variety of improvements have been made in recent years, in the management of FADs in the Atlantic and other oceans, much progress remains to be made. The Advisory Council for Outermost Regions (CCRUP) **recommends the need to adopt effective and consistent measures** across the oceans, **including systems to ensure the accountability and compliance of the actions.**

Opinion of *Organización Productores Asociados de Grandes Atuneros Congeladores (OPAGAC)*, *Europêche* and *Comité National des Pêches Maritimes et des Élevages Marins (CNPMEM)*:

These organizations do not share either the title or the content of this recommendation, since they understand that the FAD fishery, while it is a significant component of the world tropical tuna fisheries, is subject to a sufficient management structure in the ICCAT area.

They indicate that, namely, in ICCAT, catches using FADs have declined since the adoption of European Commission measures, to the point where in 2020 and 2021 bigeye tuna catches were 59.033 and 46.893 tons respectively, i.e., 3.500 and 15.000 tons below the ICCAT-adopted total allowable catches (TACs) for those years, of 62.500 and 61.500 tons (file published by the Secretariat for the ICCAT Panel 1 meeting). These TACs, as well as those applicable in 2022 and 2023 (62.000 tons) are very conservative, since they ensure a recovery of bigeye tuna stocks, with a probability higher than 90% (Kobe tables available for the most recent bigeye stock assessment).

At the same time, the abundance indices of the longline fishery in the purse seine fishery area show increasing trends for both yellowfin and bigeye (documents presented by Japan at the Tropical Tuna Strategy Assessment meeting, in addition to other indicators presented by the United States and Central American countries during the same meeting). All these indicators point to the fact that the bigeye tuna continues its recovery process, and the yellowfin tuna remains in good condition.

Therefore, OPAGAC, *Europêche* and CNPMEM do not understand the need to adopt new measures on FADs in ICCAT, since the existing measures are having impacts beyond expected.

The President of the Executive Committee of the CCRUP,

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(David Pavón González)