

Recommendation No. 59

Conservation and Management of Tropical Tuna in the Indian Ocean 2025

At the Annual Meeting of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC), held in Bangkok in May 2024, 24 proposals were approved, with the emphasis being on specific management procedures for skipjack tuna (*Katsuwonus pelamis*) and swordfish (*Xiphias gladius*). Proposals on marine pollution, climate change and transshipment reporting obligations were also put forward. The European Union (EU) has defended several positions in line with the recommendations of the Outermost Regions Advisory Council (CCRUP), proposing, for example, to address the situation of overfishing of yellowfin tuna (*Thunnus albacares*) and the closure of fishing for one month for all types of fishing, with the exception of artisanal vessels, with a view to mitigating the socioeconomic impacts that could result from this closure. Artisanal fishing in the outermost regions is selective and catches respect appropriate sizes and weights, thereby guaranteeing the sustainability of these fisheries and the protection of marine ecosystems. In order to improve compliance and control, the EU also proposed a scheme for boarding and inspection on the high seas and it managed to adopt a resolution on regional observers, also including several proposals aimed at protecting sharks. A number of resolutions were adopted on the EU's initiative, including the definition of stricter rules for transshipments at sea and the proposal regarding regional observers. As regards the management of Fish Aggregating Devices (FAD), the number per vessel was reduced, and the implementation of biodegradable FADs was regulated.¹

The fishing activities carried out by some Asian fleets in the Indian Ocean fail to comply with the established management measures, and a considerable portion of the catches are carried out by fleets using a mixture of gear, whose impact on the ecosystem is unknown, particularly due to the lack of observers on board. This lack of application of IOTC rules is detrimental to European fleets in the Indian Ocean, particularly Mayotte and Reunion Island.

¹ European Commission. (2024). *Response to the CCRUP opinion on the conservation and management of tropical tuna in the Indian Ocean.*

The summary of the status of tuna and tuna-related species under the IOTC mandate, as well as other species impacted by IOTC fisheries, found as follows:

Albacore tuna (*Thunnus alalunga*)²:

No new assessment of the albacore tuna stock was carried out (*Thunnus alalunga*) in 2023, so the 2024 opinion was based on the 2022 assessment, concluding that the albacore tuna stock is not overexploited or overfished. However, the Scientific Committee warned of significant uncertainty regarding the data collected, noting the need to improve data collection.

Bigeye tuna (*Thunnus obesus*)³:

No new assessment of the bigeye tuna stock was carried out (*Thunnus obesus*) in 2023, so the 2024 opinion was based on the 2022 assessment, determining that the bigeye tuna unit was overexploited and subject to overfishing, becoming the target of a Management Procedure, which resulted in Resolution 22/03, to establish the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for 2024-2026.

Skipjack tuna (*Katsuwonus pelamis*)⁴:

In 2023 a new stock assessment was carried out for skipjack tuna (*Katsuwonus pelamis*), with the 2024 opinion being based on this assessment, determining that the skipjack tuna stock was not overexploited or subject to overfishing.

Yellowfin tuna (*Thunnus albacares*)⁵:

Sustainable management of yellowfin tuna fishing in the Indian Ocean is urgent, considering the unsustainable fishing practices that this species is subject to, associated with illegal fishing, particularly fishing with driftnets, despite it being prohibited, which increases the pressure on the stock.

² Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC). (2024). Stock status summary for albacore tuna (*Thunnus alalunga*).

³ Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC). (2024). Stock status summary for bigeye tuna (*Thunnus obesus*).

⁴ Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC). (2024). Stock status summary for skipjack tuna (*Katsuwonus pelamis*).

⁵ Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC). (2024). Stock status summary for yellowfin tuna (*Thunnus albacares*).

Catches of tuna by Contracting Parties and Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties (CPCs) that have implemented resolution 21/01 have decreased. However, catches by CPCs that opposed the resolution remain well above the limit set out in the recovery plan, which reduces the effectiveness of efforts and threatens long-term sustainable management.

In December 2024, the IOTC Scientific Committee, based on a new assessment of the yellowfin tuna stock (*Thunnus albacares*) demonstrated that the stock was neither overfished nor subject to overfishing. The assessment showed a significant recovery in the population, with an 89% probability of falling within the green quadrant of the Kobe diagram, despite the Scientific Council having warned about doubts in the data used, especially in the Catch per Unit Effort (CPUE) indices, recommending caution when defining future catch limits.

Sharks:

As far as sharks are concerned, we recognise that the EU has been a pioneer in the fight against finning, through the proposal for “naturally attached fins”.

CCRUP recognises the EU's commitment to putting into place measures to reduce the impacts of fishing on sensitive shark species, considering that pelagic sharks represent a significant proportion of bycatch. However, several factors contribute to non-compliance and the continued overexploitation of sharks by some CPCs, and further measures are still needed to ensure the protection and recovery of shark populations.

CCRUP recommends to the European Commission to continue efforts aimed at reducing shark mortality, through:

- Resubmission of a proposal regarding the “naturally fixed fins” of sharks and rays;
- Continuing to advocate measures that reduce shark mortality when the Scientific Committee so recommends, whilst preserving the competitiveness of European fleets regarding bycatches;

- It advocates that exemptions from the ban on the capture of endangered shark species should apply only to artisanal vessels and those intended for subsistence fishing, seeking to prohibit the entry of products from these animals into European trade;
- It encourages better data collection on sharks to obtain more reliable data on these populations;
- Support the adoption by IOTC of the conclusions and recommendations from the longline bycatch mitigation measures workshop (held at the WPEB meeting in April 2024), prohibiting shark lines and wire leaders and transitioning to monofilament leaders in all tuna and tuna-like longline fisheries in the IOTC area of competence.
- Intervene before IOTC to task the Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch (WPEB) and Scientific Committee (SC) to issue, in 2025, clear scientific advice on additional mitigation measures for shark species identified by the SC as requiring mortality reduction and propose these measures for adoption by the Commission in 2026. The measures should be developed for all gear types and mortality reduction should be prioritised for oceanic whitetip sharks, silky sharks and shortfin mako sharks, as well as for scalloped hammerhead sharks and thresher sharks. Additional measures may also include retention bans for certain shark species.

In this way, **CCRUP recommends that the European Commission:**

- Seeks to reach a consensus on a regime for boarding and inspections on the high seas;
- Promotes commitments to good practices by other CPCs, avoiding the loss of competitiveness of European fleets, particularly those of Mayotte and La Réunion;
- Promotes the adoption of a management plan for yellowfin tuna (*Thunnus albacares*), replacing the recovery plan, considering the latest data from the IOTC Scientific Committee;
- Ensures fair and equitable quotas for our fishermen;
- If the closure of any fishery is unavoidable, maintains the exemption from the closure of fishing for artisanal fleets.

Opinion of the *Asociación Tinerfeña Amigos de la Naturaleza* - ATAN

As far as Yellowfin Tuna are concerned, ATAN considers that the wording should maintain that “excessive fishing of juvenile fish increases pressure on the population”.

Opinion of *Sciaena* and *Asociación Tinerfeña Amigos de la Naturaleza* (ATAN)

Sciaena and ATAN do not agree that measures to reduce shark mortality should be advocated only when the Scientific Committee recommends it. The defence of sharks must be a priority without subjecting this to any other issue.