

## Recommendation No. 79

### **Conservation and Management of Tropical Tunas in the Indian Ocean 2026**

In the context of the forthcoming annual session of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC), the Outermost Regions Advisory Council (CCRUP) recognises that the challenges facing fisheries management in this area are multiple and complex. In this regard, it considers it essential to promote responsible fisheries, underpinned by robust management based on the best available scientific knowledge, as well as an approach that ensures the protection of marine resources and the habitats on which they depend. Accordingly, it calls for all future recommendations adopted within the IOTC framework to be based on three main elements:

- Sustainability: The central objective should be to ensure the efficient and responsible management of tuna resources and the economic activities that depend on them, while minimising as far as possible any negative impacts on the marine ecosystem and on Endangered, Threatened and Protected (ETP) species. This approach seeks to guarantee the long-term viability both of the exploited stocks and of the ecosystem itself. In this context, it is important to emphasise that the protection of ETP species requires integrated strategies that give priority, in the first instance, to the prevention of bycatch or, where this is not possible, to its effective minimisation;
- Science and precautionary approach: The measures and guidance adopted should be based on the best available scientific knowledge. Whenever the available information is insufficient or does not permit an unequivocal scientific opinion to be issued, the precautionary principle should prevail in decision-making;
- Equity in the application of the rules: The effectiveness of measures adopted within the IOTC framework depends on their uniform application and full compliance by all Contracting Parties and Cooperating non-Contracting Parties (CPCs), irrespective of the type of fishing gear used. For conservation and management measures to produce tangible results, it is essential that they cover all relevant fisheries, thereby avoiding selective or partial application.

## **1. Management of Tropical Tunas**

### **1.1. Skipjack Tuna (*Katsuwonus pelamis*)**

Considering that IOTC Resolution 25/03 establishes a Total Allowable Catch (TAC) of 628,606 tonnes for 2026, with a progressive reduction to be phased in until 2028, and that the Scientific Committee confirmed in 2025 that there were no exceptional circumstances justifying any amendment to that TAC; further considering that, as regards the European catch limit, the IOTC Secretariat informed CPCs that the reduction would apply in full already in 2026, thereby establishing a European Union catch limit of 125,000 tonnes; and considering also that Indonesia requested an adjustment to ensure genuinely progressive implementation and that the European Union requested that this matter be discussed in the Working Party on the Implementation of Conservation and Management Measures (WPICMM), with a view to harmonised application across CPCs and to a recommendation to the IOTC Compliance Committee.

**In this context, we recommend that the European Commission advocate within the IOTC for the progressive implementation, until 2028, of the reduction in the skipjack tuna catch limit applicable to the European Union fleet, as permitted by Resolution 25/03, so as to ensure equitable conditions of competition among CPCs and to mitigate disproportionate socio-economic impacts.**

### **1.2. Yellowfin Tuna (*Thunnus albacares*)**

Considering the confirmed status of yellowfin tuna stocks in the green quadrant of the Kobe plot, with an estimated probability of 76.6% of being in that quadrant in 2024 (the last year assessed using complete scientific data), and that the stock is considered not overfished and not subject to overfishing.

Noting also that the Scientific Committee considered a new assessment in 2026 to be unnecessary, that a full assessment would take place in 2027, and that the management advice for 2026 (total catch of 421,000 tonnes) would be extended to 2027 and 2028.

Recognising the efforts made by several CPCs, including the European Union, Seychelles and the Maldives, to achieve this outcome.

**In view of the above, we recommend that, should there be a transition to a management plan replacing a recovery plan, any such plan should apply to all CPCs and include a safeguard clause in the event of non-compliance.**

## 2. Swordfish

### 2.1. Swordfish (*Xiphias gladius*)

Considering that Resolution 25/07 of the IOTC, “Management Procedure for Swordfish in the IOTC Area of Competence”, explicitly provides for the implementation of a management procedure that includes Harvest Control Rules (HCRs) for swordfish, with their adoption and implementation to take place no later than the end of the 29th Session of the Commission in 2025.

Noting that these rules have been under development and discussion within the Working Party on Methods (WPM) for several years.

Observing that their effective adoption has so far been postponed, despite the various scientific opinions emphasising the need for management based on pre-defined rules in order to ensure the sustainability of the stocks — which are currently assessed as not overfished and not subject to overfishing.

CCRUP considers that the adoption and validation by the IOTC of these harvest control rules now constitute an absolute priority in order to reinforce the credibility of management measures, ensure a precautionary and science-based approach, and avoid further delays that would jeopardise the objectives of sustainability and equity among CPCs.

Accordingly, **CCRUP recommends that the European Commission advocate, at the next annual session of the IOTC, for the validation and immediate entry into force of the HCRs for swordfish, in accordance with Resolution 25/07 and the conclusions of the 29th Session.**

## 3. Sharks and Associated Species

### 3.1. Shark Reporting Requirements

CCRUP notes that the reporting requirements established under Resolutions 15/01 and 15/02 are not being fully complied with, which compromises the conduct of rigorous stock assessments and the adoption of effective conservation and management measures for shark species identified by the IOTC as priorities.

In this context, CCRUP expresses its support for the proposed amendment to Resolution 15/01 recommended by the IOTC Scientific Committee.

Accordingly, **CCRUP recommends that the European Commission advocate the strengthening of an expanded list of species subject to mandatory reporting**, recognising that these data are essential for future scientific stock assessments and for the definition of appropriate conservation and management measures, namely:

1. That silky shark (*Carcharhinus falciformis*) should also be subject to mandatory reporting in gillnet fisheries;
2. That hammerhead sharks should be reported at species level, at a minimum for scalloped hammerhead (*Sphyrna lewini*), smooth hammerhead (*Sphyrna zygaena*) and great hammerhead (*Sphyrna mokarran*), and that this should apply to all gear types, including purse seine fisheries;
3. That mantas and devil rays should be reported at species level, distinguishing, at a minimum, between mantas — giant oceanic manta ray (*Mobula birostris*) and reef manta ray (*Mobula alfredi*) — and the remaining devil rays (other species of the genus *Mobula*), and that such reporting should become mandatory, at least for purse seine and gillnet fisheries, rather than voluntary;
4. That great white shark (*Carcharodon carcharias*) should be subject to mandatory reporting for all gear types;
5. That oceanic whitetip shark (*Carcharhinus longimanus*) should also be subject to mandatory reporting for all gear types.

### 3.2. Shark Conservation and Management Measures

CCRUP supports the sustainable management of shark stocks targeted by directed fisheries within the IOTC framework. Within this organisation’s Convention Area, stocks of blue shark (*Prionace glauca*), shortfin mako (*Isurus oxyrinchus*) and silky shark (*Carcharhinus falciformis*) are commercially exploited by several fleets, including small-scale fleets, and should therefore be subject to Management Strategy Evaluations (MSEs) and appropriate Management Procedures.

We also recognise that mortality associated with shark bycatch in the IOTC area remains high. The Scientific Committee has repeatedly identified the need to reduce fishing mortality in certain species, in particular shortfin mako, oceanic whitetip shark (*Carcharhinus longimanus*) and silky shark.

In this context, **we recommend that the European Commission advocate within the IOTC for existing bycatch mitigation measures to be applied consistently by all fleets**, and for additional research to be considered with a view to minimising and, wherever possible, eliminating incidental catches, as well as increasing post-release survival. These actions should give priority to species classified by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as endangered or critically endangered, and should cover all gear types.

We note the Scientific Committee’s recommendation that analyses be carried out to determine whether the prohibition on retention of thresher sharks (*Alopias spp.*) and oceanic whitetip shark constitutes, in itself, a sufficient conservation measure to reduce the mortality of these species.

We also agree with the Scientific Committee that retention bans are only effective in reducing species-specific mortality to the extent that they ensure the survival of at least some of the sharks caught and brought on board, depending to a large extent on the proportion of individuals that are alive and in good condition at the time of capture, as well as on their post-release survival — factors that vary significantly between species.

Finally, the Scientific Committee noted that there are other vulnerable species, in addition to thresher sharks and oceanic whitetip shark, that would benefit from the application of rigorous management measures, including shortfin mako, whose 2024 assessment indicated that the stock is overfished and subject to overfishing, as is also the case for silky shark.

### **3.3. Bycatch Mitigation Measures and Reduction of Mortality of Endangered, Threatened and Protected (ETP) Shark Species**

Resolution 25/08, in paragraph 40, calls on CPCs with reported shark catches and landings to develop research aimed, inter alia, at identifying ways of making fishing gear more selective and reducing the mortality of sharks caught incidentally, in particular those species listed in paragraph 3. In this context, **we call on the European Commission to request that the IOTC undertake additional studies with a view to reducing shark bycatch in longline and gillnet fisheries.**

We note that the Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch (WPEB) has repeatedly recommended that studies be carried out to validate existing scientific findings (notably Senko et al., 2022; Allman et al., 2021), which indicate benefits from the use of green LED lights in gillnets to mitigate bycatch in the Indian Ocean. CCRUP welcomes the fact that efforts by the European Union have contributed to the inclusion, in the WPEB work programmes for 2026 and 2027, of studies testing mitigation measures in gillnets, including LED lights and subsurface adjustments, as priority topics for the development of status indicators for incidentally caught stocks. Nevertheless, we express concern about the risk that this work may remain merely exploratory, without measurable progress, in a context in which the mortality of vulnerable shark species in gillnets is acknowledged to be high and in which the use of coloured LED lights has also been reported as effective in reducing bycatch of sharks, rays, sea turtles and cetaceans. **Accordingly, we recommend that the European Commission propose a clear concept and a defined timetable for these studies, including deadlines for the preparation of protocols by the WPEB, the conduct of trials, and the submission of results and recommendations for possible adoption, ideally by 2028.**

We also welcome the Scientific Committee's advice encouraging CPCs to continue research on leader materials and their implications for shark bycatch and mortality, as well as on alternative gear configurations, and we therefore **recommend that the European Commission actively encourage and support this type of study.**

Considering document [IOTC-2025-SC28-11](#), which describes a pilot experimental action developed by the Spanish surface longline fleet targeting swordfish (*Xiphias gladius*) in the Indian Ocean, using terminal devices known as “lazos” or loops, which have demonstrated significant reductions in bycatch when used in the Mediterranean Sea, as recommended by the Scientific Committee, **CCRUP supports the continuation of these trials in the Indian Ocean** so as to assess their impact both on target species and on bycatch, and **further recommends the introduction of specific codes in longline logbooks and in Regional Observer Scheme (ROS) templates**, enabling the systematic collection of data on the use of these devices, as well as the collection of catch data at species level, by type of fishing effort configuration, based on hooks and on loops.

Regarding the use of wire leaders, [Resolution 25/08](#) establishes the need to carry out trials in order to determine whether they lead to higher levels of catch and mortality of vulnerable and target sharks than monofilament nylon leaders. Following prolonged technical discussions and several inconclusive attempts within the WPEB, including a scientific workshop held in 2024, CCRUP welcomes the robust scientific approach agreed by the Scientific Committee for this assessment, based on a paired-comparison experimental design alternating control (nylon) and experimental (wire) leaders, in accordance with the criteria set out in paragraph 151 of the [2025 Scientific Committee report](#).

We recognise the operational complexities, time constraints and difficulties associated with the implementation of field trials, but recommend that the study be initiated without further delay, so as to enable the submission of results to the WPEB and the Scientific Committee in 2027, as requested by [Resolution 25/08](#). CCRUP further acknowledges that several CPCs consider that the scientific evidence already reviewed by the WPEB and the results of the dedicated workshop are sufficient to demonstrate the effectiveness of this gear modification, but stresses the importance of completing the agreed scientific process in order to ensure robust and widely accepted decisions.

### 3.4. Minimum Standards for Best Handling and Release Practices

Resolution 25/08 seeks to reduce post-release shark mortality by requiring CPCs to ensure that vessels under their jurisdiction release sharks as quickly as possible, whenever this occurs, while giving due regard to the safety of crew and observers, and in accordance with the Minimum Standards for Safe Handling and Live Release Procedures set out in Annex III to that Resolution. The same Resolution further provides that the IOTC Scientific Committee shall review these Minimum Standards by 31 December 2025 and subsequently submit recommendations to the Commission on any further improvements, for consideration and adoption at the 2026 Annual Session.

Accordingly, CCRUP continues to advocate the reduction, to the greatest extent possible, of mortality of ETP species and, in this regard, **recommends that the standards of best practice for the handling and**

**release of sharks and mobulids be kept up to date**, as recommended by the Scientific Committee. **We also recommend that scientific research and the development of technical improvements in this area** continue to be promoted, evaluated and updated within the relevant IOTC working groups.

### 3.5. Specific Species

- Blue Sharks (*Prionace glauca*)

**We recommend that the European Commission propose a clear deadline for the completion of Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) testing and define management objectives to guide its development.** Said objectives should be based on those recently adopted for other species, as well as on the objectives proposed — though not yet adopted — for blue sharks within the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), with a view to the long-term sustainable management of the stock. In this context, it is important to take into account the lower fecundity of sharks and their greater vulnerability to overfishing when compared with tunas and related species.

We support the scientific recommendation that fishing pressure should not be increased while current uncertainties regarding the status of the stock persist and therefore advocate the adoption of a precautionary approach. Accordingly, **we recommend that the European Commission submit a TAC proposal at the lower bound of the 95% confidence interval of Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY)**, for possible adoption by the IOTC in 2026, as a provisional management measure until the current uncertainties are resolved through the next MSE process.

Finally, **we recommend that measures be taken to monitor the stock rigorously, in particular as regards catch and discard reporting.** In this context, we reiterate the Scientific Committee's call for the catch recording and reporting requirements under [Resolution 16/06](#) to be further improved, so as to strengthen the available information base and the quality of future scientific advice.

- Shortfin Mako (*Isurus oxyrinchus*)

In 2024, the IOTC Scientific Committee assessed the shortfin mako stock as overfished and subject to overfishing, and recommended that future catches should not exceed 40% of the catch levels recorded at the time of the assessment. This limitation would make it possible to maintain a probability of less than 50% of exceeding MSY reference points over a period of 10 years, thereby enabling the stock to rebuild to the green quadrant of the Kobe plot with at least a 50% probability within that period.

We welcome the Scientific Committee's recommendations aimed at halting the stock's decline and increasing the probability of its recovery, while also underlining the importance of ensuring full compliance

with recording and reporting requirements by all fleets. We further recognise that the stock assessment projections indicate that setting a TAC of 300 tonnes or less, taking into account all forms of mortality (including landings, dead discards and post-release mortality), would provide a probability of around 60% of rebuilding the stock to the green quadrant of the Kobe plot over the next 10 years.

- Whale Sharks (*Rhincodon typus*)

Document IOTC-2025-SC28-INF02 presents preliminary results of a study based on Close-Kin Mark-Recapture (CKMR) concerning whale sharks in the Indian Ocean, indicating that the adult population of this species across the entire Convention Area is small and showed a significant decline between 2000 and 2019. The study concludes that there is a 9% probability of population decline, as well as a 73% probability that this decline exceeds 2% per year.

In the light of these findings, **CCRUP recommends that the European Commission support the formal inclusion of whale shark in the list of shark species covered by Resolution 25/08 for which retention is prohibited**, taking into account that the IOTC Scientific Committee has classified this species as “a taxon of high biological vulnerability and conservation concern for which very few data are available”, as defined in that Resolution.

- Hammerhead Sharks (*Sphyrnidae*)

Due to their high vulnerability, overfishing and the high value of their fins in international trade, hammerhead sharks rank among the most threatened shark species, qualifying as “species of high biological vulnerability and conservation concern for which very few data are available”. While adult individuals are caught by various fisheries within the IOTC framework, juveniles are heavily exploited by coastal fisheries, particularly in nursery areas.

To date, the conservation measures in force have proved insufficient to halt the global decline in hammerhead shark populations. In this context, **CCRUP recommends that the European Commission propose the inclusion of all hammerhead shark species of the family *Sphyrnidae* occurring in the Indian Ocean in the list of species covered by paragraph 3 of Resolution 25/08**, for which it is prohibited to retain on board, tranship, land or store any part or whole carcass.

#### **4. Incidental Catches and Interactions with Cetaceans**

In accordance with IOTC Resolution 23/06 on the conservation of cetaceans, **we recommend that the European Commission promote a comprehensive review of the available information on the status**

of cetaceans in the IOTC area of competence and that, on the basis of that information, effective measures be advocated, adopted and applied to protect marine mammals from the negative impacts of fisheries.

**We further recommend that the European Commission request the Scientific Committee to undertake a specific analysis of interactions between cetaceans and gillnet fisheries**, proposing appropriate measures to the IOTC, bearing in mind that this gear type constitutes one of the main sources of such interactions and, at the same time, one of the least documented.

We also recall that the integration of data relating to bait used in tropical longline fisheries is essential from an ecosystem-based management perspective, as discussed at the 27th Annual Meeting of the IOTC. In this context, **we recommend that the European Commission advocate the introduction of mandatory reporting requirements concerning bait used in IOTC fisheries.**

## **5. Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS)**

**We recommend that the European Commission advocate within the IOTC for the introduction and mandatory use of a regional Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) for all fleets operating in the IOTC Convention Area, as well as for the updating and resubmission, by the European Commission, of the proposal for a High Seas Boarding and Inspection Scheme.**

## **6. Transshipments**

**We recommend that the European Commission advocate the complete elimination of transshipments and support all proposals to that effect.** This applies in particular to CPCs that have requested the use of alternatives to the Flag State Notification Approach (FNA), since monitoring and compliance verification are substantially weakened when stocks are the subject of transshipment at sea.

## **7. Scientific Research**

**CCRUP recommends that the European Commission ensure adequate and sufficient funding for the development of scientific work within the IOTC framework**, as well as the provision of the necessary human resources to ensure the effective participation of EU scientists in all relevant IOTC subsidiary bodies. We consider that specific efforts should be devoted to the development of multiannual management plans, based on the results of ongoing Management Strategy Evaluation processes. These multiannual management procedures should cover all commercially exploited stocks, ideally through a multispecies approach.

## 8. Observers

We recall that EU purse seiners voluntarily apply 100% on-board observer coverage and that the Electronic Monitoring System (EMS) should facilitate improved coverage for other fleets. In this context, **we recommend that the European Commission advocate, within the IOTC, for a progressive increase in observer coverage from 5% to 20% across all fishing gears.**