

Collective Best Practices for Well-Managed At-Sea Transshipment



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At-sea transshipment of catch between vessels plays a large and important role in the global commercial fishing industry. Each year, hundreds of refrigerated cargo vessels take tuna caught by thousands of longline fishing vessels and bring it to shore for processing.

While at-sea transshipment's role in international tuna fisheries is significant, regulatory controls and monitoring are inadequate. These gaps create risks for labor and human rights abuses, can reduce observer safety, and create opportunities for IUU fishing activities, fraud, and catch laundering. Insufficient monitoring can also undermine traceability, the provision of required data collection, and effective implementation of bycatch mitigation measures.

Leading NGOs focused on global tuna sustainability – and convened through the NGO Tuna Forum – agree that the risks of at-sea transshipment can be mitigated through,

among other things, 100% observer coverage (human and/or electronic) and appropriate notice, reporting, and data-sharing requirements.

Further, the group agrees that core best practices must be met before at-sea transshipment can be considered to be well-managed, well-monitored and transparent.

These best practices, outlined below, are designed to inform and guide tuna regional fishery management organizations (RFMOs), fishery improvement projects (FIPs), fisheries management authorities, Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certified fisheries with conditions, and commercial processing and harvesting sectors across the supply chain in developing and/or reforming at-sea transshipment regulations, policies and procedures, and compliance regimes to ensure this fishing-related activity is effectively well-managed.

Collective Best Practices

The following best practices has been agreed on by leading NGOs engaged in global tuna sustainability. While not comprehensive, these best practices are critical to ensuring that at-sea transshipment is well-managed and transparent:

Management Best Practices

- Prohibit vessels from acting as both a fishing vessel and carrier vessel on the same trip.
- Require all carrier vessels to be flagged to an RFMO member or at minimum a Cooperating Non-Member.
- Ensure that all RFMOs establish a publicly available record of all vessels authorized to engage in at-sea transshipment activities.
- Require that vessels have an IMO number in order to be authorized to transship.
- Establish and implement guidelines for how vessels receive authorization to transship at sea, including criteria defining under which circumstances a flag state can authorize its flag vessels to transship at sea, the MCS measures that must be in place, data collection and reporting requirements, and process for the RFMO to review issued flag state authorizations to ensure compliance.

Data Reporting Best Practices

- Require information on all at-sea transshipment events (notifications, declarations, observer reports) to be reported to the relevant RFMO Secretariats, flag states of both vessels, port state and coastal state, with summarized information reported publicly by the RFMO.
- Required advanced notification be provided to all relevant authorities at least 48 hours before the at-sea transshipment activity.
- Mandate that all post activity declarations and observer reports be provided to all relevant authorities, ideally immediately, but in every instance, no greater than 24 hours after the event.
- Establish procedures to share data (transshipment declarations, reported catch, position reports, observer reports) among relevant flag state, coastal state, port state authorities and RFMO Secretariats.



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Monitoring Best Practices

- Require that all vessels authorized to conduct at-sea transshipment have an operational VMS system onboard and that VMS position data are provided to the relevant RFMO Secretariat in near-real time.
- Require the use of AIS in case of VMS unit malfunction.
- Require 100 percent observer coverage (human, electronic or combination) on board both the fishing vessel and the carrier vessel for all at-sea transshipping events.
- Require binding measures and specific training to ensure human observer safety, such as those highlighted in [***Policies and Recommendations to Improve the Safety of Fisheries Observers Deployed in Tuna Fisheries.***](#)
- Ensure there is a mandate for binding data collection protocols for transshipment observers, including data for both scientific and compliance purposes.