



## **GTA Requirements for a Draft Resolution on Rebuilding Indian Ocean Yellowfin Tuna**

### **Background**

Indian Ocean yellowfin tuna is overfished with overfishing occurring. The Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) held an abbreviated remote meeting in November 2020 and agreed to hold a special session from 7<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> March 2021 to discuss rebuilding yellowfin.

The Global Tuna Alliance believes the most effective way to reach an agreement at this meeting is for a CPC to present a draft resolution that specifies how the yellowfin stock could be rebuilt in two generations.

We have been informed that the IOTC Scientific Committee (SciCom) will not have a new assessment ready; this will be presented at the WPTT in Sept/Oct. The SciCom report from 2020 will be available, however and the 2016 catch advice, a strong reduction in catch, is still valid. It has not been replaced/repealed.

### **GTA Recommendations**

A draft resolution is submitted that includes:

1. An overall 20% cut in catch compared to 2014 levels<sup>1</sup>;
2. A Total Allowable Catch with minimal exemptions;
3. Catch reductions which are proportionate, impactful and equitable - without prejudice to ongoing TAC discussions;
4. Strengthened sanctions for non-compliance

Each of these areas are covered in more detail on the following pages.

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<sup>1</sup> Baseline years may vary by CPC; for example, within 19/01 Seychelles' baseline is 2015 and Mauritius' is 2018. Other CPCs may require similar considerations – the GTA's central call is for a reduction within the Indian Ocean in line with scientific advice

## **1. An overall 20% cut in catch compared to 2014 levels**

As noted above, in 2015, the IOTC Scientific Committee recommended that the catches of yellowfin tuna had to be reduced by 20% of the 2014 catch levels to recover the stocks to levels above the interim target reference points with 50% probability by 2024 (IOTC–2015–SC18).

*This advice remains valid to date.*

Based on data provided in the IOTC Scientific Committee, and subsequently substantiated in an independently produced [report](#) commissioned by the GTA, a catch reduction of 25% relative to the catch in the year 2017 was calculated to be necessary for recovering the stock in two generations.

However, a 20% reduction of the 2014 catch levels is similar to a 25% catch reduction<sup>2</sup> relative to the catch in the year 2017, and the GTA has elected to adopt the current IOTC Scientific Committee advice for the special session.

## **2. A Total Allowable Catch with minimal exemptions**

Resolution 15/01 “On target and limit reference points and a decision framework” sets interim target and limit reference points for the major tuna stocks in the Indian Ocean, including yellowfin tuna. This resolution indicated that the IOTC Scientific Committee shall recommend options for Harvest Control Rules (HCRs) to the Commission taking the following into account: that the biomass is maintained at or above levels required to produce maximum sustainable yield (MSY) or its proxy; the fishing mortality rate (F) is kept at or below FMSY or its proxy; and that the biomass stays above BLIM (Minimum biomass limit) and the fishing mortality rate below FLIM (Fishing mortality rate associated with the limit reference point).

In 2017, the IOTC Commission adopted the ‘Schedule of work for the development of management procedures for key species in the IOTC Area’ (IOTC-2017-S21-R, Appendix 9). The schedule outlines the process that will need to be followed and the decisions that need to be made to develop management procedures for key IOTC species including yellowfin. Work on a draft resolution for a yellowfin tuna management procedure has been progressing since 2019 there is optimism that a yellowfin tuna management procedure can potentially be adopted in 2021.

The management procedure should be used to set a global TAC which ensures that the objectives noted above are achieved. Given that under normal circumstances the assessment of tropical tunas stocks in the Indian Ocean is carried out every three years, it is understood that the TAC should be set for three year periods, and the new TAC implemented the year immediately after the scientific advice is published.

## **3. Catch reductions which are proportionate, impactful and equitable**

In 2016, the IOTC adopted an interim rebuilding plan (Resolution 16/01), to address overfishing of the stock of yellowfin tuna. This Resolution attempts to implement a gear-wise reduction relative to the 2014 base year.

The IOTC set out catch reductions for the fisheries which surpassed specified catch thresholds in 2014 (Circular 2016-077). CPCs agreed to observe these catch limits for yellowfin tuna starting in January 2017. The catch limits applied in all rebuilding measures apply to all fishing vessels targeting

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<sup>2</sup> A 20% catch reduction of 2014 levels would be 323,004mt versus 313,919mt for a 25% catch reduction of 2017 levels.

tuna and tuna-like species in the Indian Ocean of 24 metres overall length and over, and those under 24 metres if they fish outside the EEZ of their flag state, within the IOTC Area of Competence.

Fisheries affected, catch reductions and catch limits were established as indicated below:

- Purse seine: CPCs whose purse seine catches of yellowfin reported for 2014 were above 5,000 MT to reduce their purse seine catches of yellowfin by 15% from the 2014 levels.
- Gillnet: CPCs whose gillnet catches of yellowfin reported for 2014 were above 2,000 MT to reduce their gillnet catches of yellowfin by 10% from the 2014 levels.
- Longline: CPCs whose Longline catches of yellowfin reported for 2014 were above 5,000 MT to reduce their Longline catches of yellowfin by 10% from the 2014 levels.
- CPCs's other gears: CPCs whose catches of yellowfin from other gears reported for 2014 were above 5,000 MT to reduce their other gear catches of yellowfin by 5% from the 2014 levels.

Since the beginning of the yellowfin tuna rebuilding plan, this criterion of application has been maintained. However, we believe that this is one of the main weaknesses of the plan, since it allows those countries that exceed the catch limits established by the plan, to be exempted from the application of the reductions if they have fishing vessels <24m LOA operating within its EEZ. In those cases, the reduction will not be applied.

The GTA has no position on how a 20% catch reduction is achieved, other than any strategy is proportionate, impactful and equitable.

Notwithstanding, our independently produced [report](#) proposes three strategies for achieving a 25% cut in catch which may be informative. These are covered in section VIII: Proposals for catch reduction.

#### 4. Strengthened sanctions for non-compliance

2017 was the first year that the CPCs were required to implement the agreed catch reductions in 16/01. Results were mixed. Table 1, below, lists the nine fisheries required to reduce their catch in 2017, based on their baselines. While some fisheries reported a substantial reduction in catch, their efforts barely offset those fleets whose catches increased in 2017. Overall, the catches for fleets subject to the reductions decreased by one per cent.

Table 1: Yellowfin tuna catches in 2017 by fleet and gear type in relation to the requirements of Resolution 16/01

Fishery	Required % catch reduction from 2014/2015 baseline	% change from baseline in 2017
EU purse seine fleet	-15%	-5%
Korea purse seine fleet	-15%	-28%
Seychelles purse seine fleet	-15%	7%
Taiwan longline fleet	-10%	-26%
Sri Lanka longline fleet	-10%	-25%
India gillnet fleet	-10%	-15%
Iran gillnet fleet	-10%	33%
Maldives bait boat fleet	-5%	-5%
Maldives hand-line fleet	-5%	1%

Resolution 16/01 has been revised three times over the past four years. Table 2 lists the fleets that were subject to Resolution 17/01 and the catch reductions required of them in 2018, based on their baselines.

The 21st Session of the IOTC Working Party on Tropical Tunas (WPTT) identified inconsistencies in the reporting of catch by the EU-Spain purse seine fleet in 2018. This accounts for the two different EU catch totals and the two subsequent percentage reductions listed. However, whether the fleets subject to Resolution 17/01 reduced their total catch by 9% or 15%, the many fleets that were exempt from the resolution more than offset the reduction.

Table 2: Yellowfin tuna catches in 2018 by fleet and gear type in relation to the requirements of Resolution 17/01

Fleet	Gear	Reduction	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018		Difference with baseline			
									Absolute	%		
EU	Purse seine	15%	91 405	86 149	87 075	86 893	75 375	88 981	-16 030	-2 424	-18%	-3%
Korea	Purse seine		8 852	7 509	10 347	6 362	5 415		-3 437			
Seychelles	Purse seine		23 463	39 072	40 014	41 694	35 023		-4 049			
Taiwan	Longline	10%	12 285	13 921	16 958	9 115	10 845		-1 441			
Sri Lanka	Longline		8 625	5 933	3 939	6 448	8 554		-71			
Iran	Gillnet	10%	24 401	26 780	31 079	37 193	35 534		11 132			
Maldives	Baitboat	5%	18 481	15 796	8 550	17 500	10 749		-7 732			
Maldives	Hand line		30 246	36 300	44 385	30 563	16 704		-13 542			
<b>Total</b>			<b>217 759</b>	<b>231 461</b>	<b>242 348</b>	<b>235 767</b>	<b>198 199</b>	<b>211 805</b>	<b>-35 169</b>	<b>-21 563</b>	<b>-15%</b>	<b>-9%</b>

The 2019 catch data was published in September 2020 (Table 3). Iran's gillnet fleet exceeded its catch limit for yellowfin tuna by almost 20,000 MT in 2019.

Table 3: Yellowfin tuna catches in 2019 by fleet and gear type in relation to the requirements of Resolution 18/01

Fleet	Gear	Reduction	2014	2015	2019	Difference with baseline	
						Absolute	%
EU	Purse seine	15%	91 405	86 149	69 479	-21 926	-24%
Korea	Purse seine		8 852	7 509	8 730	-122	-1%
Seychelles	Purse seine		23 463	39 072	33 006	-6 066	-16%
Taiwan	Longline	10%	12 285	13 921	9 427	-2 858	-23%
Sri Lanka	Longline		8 625	5 933	10 746	2 121	25%
Iran	Gillnet	10%	24 401	26 780	44 024	19 623	80%
Maldives	Baitboat	5%	18 481	15 796	10 165	-8 316	-45%
Maldives	Hand line		30 246	36 300	15 918	-14 329	-47%
<b>Total</b>			<b>217 759</b>	<b>231 461</b>	<b>201 495</b>	<b>-31 873</b>	<b>-14%</b>

In addition, the many fleets that were exempt from resolution 16/01 (countries with fishing vessels under 24 m operating within their own EEZ are still exempt, regardless of whether they exceed the catch limits established by the plan) more than offset the reduction made by the fleets listed in Table 1. The following fleets were exempt from reducing their catches of yellowfin tuna:

Country/Fleet	2014 Yellowfin Catch	2019 Yellowfin Catch	Percentage Increase
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Mauritian purse seine fleet	4,844 MT	12,290 MT	154%
Indonesian purse seine fleet	5,598 MT	9,775 MT	75%
Seychelles longline fleet	1,616 MT	6,984 MT	192%
Indian gillnet fleet	5,153 MT	6,801 MT	32%
Omani gillnet fleet	2,268 MT	11,516 MT	408%
Iranian “other gears” fleets	57 MT	9,385 MT	16263%
Sri Lankan “other gears” fleets	15,280 MT	30,076 MT	97%
Omani “other gears” fleets	4,912 MT	25,219 MT	413%

As a result of these and other increases (as well as the failure of several of the fleets in Table 1 to make the required cuts) the total catch in 2019 was 427,240 MT – 4% higher than the original 2017 catch figure of 409,567 MT.

**Therefore, not only was the target catch reduction not achieved, but there was in fact a net increase in total catch.**

Unlike the previous Resolutions, Resolution 19/01 introduces new exceptions and, importantly, a “sanction mechanism” for those CPCs that exceed the annual catch limit. Although the “sanction mechanism” might be seen as a positive step towards increasing the enforcement likelihood of the catch reduction scheme, it still presents a significant weakness.

The sanction mechanism used by IOTC in cases of over catch above the annual limit is focused on post-infraction sanctions. The IOTC does not include prior control mechanisms to avoid over catch during the fishing year in progress. This is due to the fact that under the current control framework, CPCs inform to the Executive Secretary only when the fleet has already reached, or is about to reach imminently its total catch limit and the CPCs themselves are responsible for taking measures not to exceed 100% of the total catch limit. But there is no control by the IOTC Secretariat to ensure that this is enforced.