



2021 RFMO Review

GLOBAL TUNA ALLIANCE

IOTC

Rebuild Yellowfin Tuna

The 23rd session of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) Scientific Committee took place late in 2020, and concluded that on the weight-of-evidence available in 2018 and 2019, the yellowfin tuna stock remained overfished and subject to overfishing. They recommended that catches be reduced to a level at least below the CMSY estimate (403, 000 MT) until new information based on the 2021 stock assessment is produced.

One of the major IOTC outcomes from 2020 was an agreement to hold a special session of the IOTC in March 2021 to discuss yellowfin tuna management. This was directly prompted by GTA Partners' public sourcing statements – and clearly demonstrated the impact of commercial leverage.

The Special Session took place from 8th-12th March and we were active in our advocacy in advance of this meeting; we contacted all IOTC delegates and shared our [position statement](#) in early January and submitted it as an information paper to the IOTC. We also prepared a resource pack for GTA Partners to facilitate engagement with relevant delegates.

Four proposals were submitted to the special session; two on rebuilding yellowfin tuna from the EU and the Maldives. There was also a proposal on drifting FAD management from Kenya. We published a [response](#) to the EU and Maldivian proposals for rebuilding overfished yellowfin and have submitted a joint [letter](#) with the Tuna Protection Alliance (TUPA) and Hy-Vee (a US retailer) to the IOTC delegates.

We have also contributed to an episode of [CNN Marketplace Africa](#) on the situation in the Indian Ocean. Our 15 minute episode, #508, was aired on several occasions from Friday 5th March.

Sadly, the meeting ended with no agreement on rebuilding yellowfin tuna; instead the Members agreed to revisit the discussion at the next full Commission meeting in June and there was hope of a joint EU-Maldives proposal. We produced a reactive [statement](#), as well as signing-on to a [joint observer position](#) that expressed our deep dissatisfaction with the outcome. In addition, GTA Partners New England Seafood International, Asda, Marks & Spencer, and Waitrose published a joint [statement](#) decrying the lack of progress.





In advance of the Commission meeting, the GTA coordinated a collaborative [letter](#) signed by 61 companies, and EuroCommerce, that calls for a rebuilding plan for Indian Ocean yellowfin. The letter received some good coverage in the trade press including [Worldfishing](#). We also published our [report](#) on juvenile yellowfin in the Indian Ocean which was picked up by [Undercurrent News](#).

Additional advocacy included a wonderful [video](#) from Chris Brown at Asda calling for action on overfished yellowfin, at our inaugural RFMO 'roundtable'. The roundtable was a 30 minute meeting where all IOTC delegates were invited to hear the concerns and asks of GTA Partners. Asda, Metro, M&S, New England Seafoods, Waitrose and World Wise Foods all spoke and 6 IOTC Delegations attended (UK, Australia, Sri Lanka, Seychelles, Somalia & Maldives).

The 25th Session of the IOTC took place from 8th-12th June. Regrettably, both the EU and Maldives submitted individual proposals to rebuild yellowfin; moving away from a joint-proposal. The EU proposal noted "a need to reduce catches below the CMSY estimate [403,000mt]" while the total allowable catch under the Maldivian proposal was 382,924mt. This is around a 15% reduction compared to 2019 catch levels. Kenya re-submitted their FAD proposal from the Special Session.

The good news is that there was an agreement on yellowfin rebuilding. The agreed measure (CMM 21/01) sets a catch limit of 401,011mt – which was 60,000mt higher than our sought limit, but is below CMSY (the maximum limit of advice from the IOTC Scientific Committee). This agreement was hard fought and the final measure was a hotch-potch of concessions.

Following the meeting, GTA Partners New England Seafood International, Asda, Marks & Spencer and Waitrose published a [statement](#). The GTA post-meeting statement was covered by [Industrias Pesqueras](#), [The Grocer](#), [Undercurrent News](#) and [Mongabay](#).

Despite the agreement, six countries indicated they would object – meaning the measure would not apply to them and instead the previous measure would apply. Immediately following the meeting, we wrote to each of the six urging them to refrain from (or reconsider) lodging a formal objection. This was accompanied by a [press statement](#) noting our concerns and an [animation](#) that explains the potential impact.

Despite our efforts, Madagascar, India, Somalia, Indonesia, Iran and Oman formally objected to the interim rebuilding plan for yellowfin. Interestingly, both Somalia and Madagascar had recently signed fisheries agreements with China – allowing Chinese vessels to fish for tuna within their EEZs. We responded to the Indian announcement with a statement which was picked up by the [Times of India](#).

These objections put the interim rebuilding plan for yellowfin at serious risk of failure. The scientific advice was to agree a total catch of less than the CMSY (catch estimated to produce maximum sustainable yield) of 403,000t. The total catch of the countries who are bound by the new rebuilding plan is 300,829t – which is lower than the CMSY. However, the objecting countries caught 144,784t in 2020 (latest catch data) and if these countries catch this in 2022 the potential total catch would be 445,613t – much higher than CMSY, and the second-highest yellowfin catch in the Indian Ocean ever.

This is why the objections matter so much.

The 2nd IOTC ad-hoc working group on FADs meeting took place from 4th-6th October. The agenda included FAD management plans and accordingly we submitted the GTA Fish Aggregating Device (FAD) Management Best Practices to inform the debate.

The IOTC Working Party on Tropical Tunas (WPTT) took place from 25th-30th October with a strong focus on the results of the new yellowfin stock assessment. This stock assessment concluded that spawning biomass in 2020 was estimated to be only 78% of the level that supports the maximum sustainable yield with current fishing mortality is estimated to be 27% higher than FMSY (fishing pressure that gives the maximum sustainable yield in the long term). The catches in the last five years have been higher than the estimated MSY and the yellowfin stock is considered be overfished and is subject to overfishing in 2020.

Another Special Session of the IOTC took place on 29th November which focussed on trying to reach a decision on whether to adopt the Kenyan drifting FAD management proposal. Following discussions on the validity of the vote taken at the 25th session of the IOTC, and possible processes the Commission might use to arrive at a decision on whether to adopt the proposal, Kenya withdrew the proposal.

The final IOTC meeting of the year was the IOTC Scientific committee which took place from 5th-9th December. The focus was yellowfin and the discussions included proposals such as:

- If catches are reduced to 60% of 2020 levels, there is >50% probability of being above BMSY levels by 2023.
- If catches are reduced to < 80% of 2020 levels, there is a >50% probability of being above BMSY in 2030.
- If catches are reduced to less than 80% of 2020 levels, there would be a >50% probability of ending overfishing ($F < F_{MSY}$) by 2023 and also by 2030.
- The probability of breaching the biological limit reference point (0.4BMSY) with 2020 catches is 7% by 2023 and 64% by 2030.
- The probability of breaching the F limit reference point (1.4 FMSY) with 2020 catch is 52% by 2023 and 78% by 2030.

If adopted, this would be the most prescriptive advice we have seen, and would provide a framework for a revised yellowfin rebuilding plan to be discussed in 2022.



IATTC

Progress - finally

2021 began inauspiciously for Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC); by failing to agree tropical tuna management measures at the 95th annual meeting (30th November – 4th December 2020), delegates were poised to leave tropical tuna fisheries in the eastern tropical Pacific completely unregulated from January 2021.

Following significant pressure and negative reactions from stakeholders (including the GTA) an emergency extraordinary meeting (96th session) was held on 22nd December 2020 and a joint-proposal from Columbia, EU, Japan, Belize, Chinese Taipei, USA, French OT was presented which aligned with a proposal from the Chair. These proposed rolling-over the old measure into 2021 and working interessionally to agree additional measures as recommended by the IATTC Scientific Committee.

A special (97th) session of IATTC was held from 7th-9th June to discuss these additional measures, including but not limited to, the improvement of the management of FADs and the collection of data to advance on the monitoring and assessment of the FAD fishery.

In advance of the meeting, the GTA joined 10 other organisations calling on IATTC delegates to use the session to build consensus toward the adoption of a multiannual conservation and management measure for yellowfin and bigeye tunas. Five proposals were considered, and discussions managed to trim down differences to a degree in advance of the 98th Annual Commission Meeting on 23rd-27th August.

The 9th session did not start promisingly, however. Six proposals were tabled, meaning we had somehow gone backwards from the 5 tabled in June. Despite 5 days of discussion, no agreement could be reached on a single text. The sticking points included lower FAD limits and extra fishery closure days for the fishing vessels catching the most bigeye tuna. One positive outcome was an agreement on the initial workplan for implementing electronic monitoring – one of our asks.





We published a reactive [statement](#) expressing our disappointment, which contained a very strong quote from Princes. In addition, we wrote to the delegates whose statements and actions appear to be hindering agreement. Working with WWF US (who planned to do the same) we developed a letter to be sent to the [El Salvador](#), [Nicaragua](#) and [Guatemala](#) IATTC delegations and via the NGO Tuna Forum, which were co-signed by Pew, Monterey Bay Aquarium, Ocean Outcomes, Earthworm Foundation, FishWise and Shark Project.

The follow-on IATTC meeting (98th session - part two), which was scheduled for October and originally intended to address issues outside the tropical tuna conservation measure, had to be re-focused on this topic to avoid a situation whereby fisheries would remain unmanaged.

Fortunately, after two years of discussions and negotiations, a new conservation measure for tropical tunas was finally approved during the second part of the 98th meeting. The new conservation measure, for the years 2022 to 2024, includes a 72-day closure of the purse seine fishery with increasing closures to vessels that exceed the annual catch limits. In addition, the measure contains new limits of fish aggregating devices (FADs) that decrease over the years, which are the primary means of controlling effort in this fishery. Also, there will be catch limits for longline fleets.

In addition to the conservation measure, the Commission adopted a Port State Measure, another of the GTA's asks. The central elements of this measure are establishing a minimum percentage of inspection for foreign vessels (5%), the designation of ports by port States, a compulsory prior notification for port access, and the reporting of possible infringements detected in the inspection.

There are still several areas that have to be addressed by the IATTC, like transshipment regulations, precautionary harvest strategies, fishery observer coverage and safety, and the improvement of the silky shark measures.

ICCAT

Make time for makos

The GTA's primary ask of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) in 2021 was to agree a prohibition on retention of north Atlantic shortfin makos. This issue was captured under ICCAT's 'Panel 4' which met in July 2021.

We were pleased to see that Canada resubmitted their strong proposal on makos, which includes a prohibition on retention of north Atlantic shortfin makos, with the UK, Gabon and Sierra Leone all co-sponsoring before the meeting started. Senegal, Chinese Taipei, Guinea-Bissau, and the Gambia all co-sponsored the proposal during the meeting but the EU maintained their previous position, which allows retention. We wrote to the EU Head of Delegation in May, following up with a letter to the EU Fisheries Commissioner with TUPA expressing our concern over this.

Unfortunately, this intersessional meeting of Panel 4 failed again to reach agreement. Instead, the three days of the meeting were spent dealing with marginal definitions and the EU seeking to draft a joint text with alternative wording for additional measures for a catch quota of 0-500 tonnes of northern mako. In addition, delegates failed to agree on increasing the minimum observer coverage requirement for longliners from 5 to 20%, nor on appropriate gear modifications (banning shark wires, mandatory use of monofilament and round hooks) or temporal/spatial closures for the fleet to avoid mako catches. They didn't even agree on the timeframe for the next stock assessment. We responded to the meeting outcome with a strong press release and social media content (images below). We also received a reply from the EU which highlighted that the EU is focussing on two arguments: a 50% probability for stock building (rather than 70%) is adequate and questioning the credibility of the data.

The only bright spot was an agreement to convene another meeting of Panel 4 in October - before the Commission Meeting in November.

This took place on 27th October with four proposals tabled: previous submissions from the USA and Canada, a new EU proposal, plus a Chair text, which was created to bring the elements of all three proposals together into one document to try to find a basis for agreement. The revised EU proposal initially received support from Japan, Senegal, Gabon, USA. However, issues soon arose including on retention rules.

There was consensus on the safe handling and release of mako shark and support for the requirements for reporting on implementation to the ICCAT, but the reporting frequency wasn't defined. Rules for biological sampling and an increase in observer coverage of 10/20% by 2023 were also discussed. Members agreed to continue working on the text before the ICCAT meeting in November.



Away from mako sharks, a Panel 1 (Tropical tunas) intersessional meeting took place in September and had the aim of finalising/endorsing new measures ahead of submitting these to the annual meeting for adoption. The intersessional focussed on initial discussions on a TAC for bigeye tuna, although a decision was deferred to the annual meeting.

Through our membership of the Long Distance Advisory Council (LDAC) we participated in a virtual meeting hosted by the EU ICCAT team on 7th October, in advance of the ICCAT Annual Meeting. At this meeting we reiterated our ask on mako sharks and asked how the EU position would take account of the supply chain, and consumer, view.

Pleasingly, a lot of progress was made at the 27th session of ICCAT which was held from 15th-23rd Nov. Firstly, a new measure was agreed establishing a prohibition on retaining North Atlantic shortfin mako on board, transshipping, and landing, whole or in part, caught in association with ICCAT fisheries in 2022 and 2023 as a first step in rebuilding. This was one of our priority asks.

In addition, the measure approved requires CPCs to “implement a rebuilding program for North Atlantic shortfin mako shark starting in 2022 to end overfishing immediately and gradually achieve biomass levels sufficient to support maximum sustainable yield (MSY) by 2070 with a probability of a range of between 60-70% at least.” This framework is clear and will help to reduce total fishing at sustainable levels to rebuild the stock.

On observer coverage, including electronic monitoring (EM), the measure establishes that CPCs shall gradually increase the coverage of all longline fishing vessels in ICCAT fisheries that may have potential interaction with North Atlantic shortfin mako sharks to 10%.

The new conservation measure for tropical tunas, including new allocations, was not approved. The agreement was instead to roll over the old conservation measures (19-02), which established a TAC of 62,500 tons for bigeye tuna and 110,000 tons for yellowfin tuna, and a two and a half months FADs prohibition in the high seas or EEZs.

Finally, ICCAT adopted its first fully-specified management procedure (MP) (a.k.a harvest strategy) for North Atlantic albacore. This stock already had a harvest control rule (HCR) in place (Rec 17-04) after adopting management objectives in 2016. Since the adoption of this HCR, managers and scientists have been working to develop & adopt the remaining elements that are needed to transform the HCR into a fully specified management procedure. This was also one of our asks!



WCPFC

Don't lose the label

Tuna fisheries in the Western Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) engaged in the MSC program face a serious situation in order to fulfill the existing conditions of certification. They need the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) to complete their current workplan and adopt robust harvest strategies for skipjack and South Pacific albacore by December 2022. For yellowfin and bigeye fisheries, the WCPFC must advance its current workplan to also finish by this date.

Without timely action, these certified fisheries could face the risk of suspension from using their MSC certificate soon after June 2023. Accordingly, the GTA asks of WCPFC include:

Accelerate action on comprehensive, precautionary harvest strategies across all tuna stocks to avoid the risk of suspension of MSC Certified tuna fisheries in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean. Specifically, in 2021:

- Adopt Target Reference Points for bigeye and yellowfin
- Adopt a list of candidate management procedures for skipjack & albacore

The issue was picked up by [Intrafish](#), [Undercurrent](#) and [SeafoodSource](#), and our [statement](#) was covered by [The Grocer](#) and [Undercurrent](#).

The WCPFC held a second 'Development of a New Tropical Tuna Measure Workshop' (TTMW2) in September. This meeting discussed management objectives and we submitted a [statement](#), which was included in the meeting papers.

In advance of the 18th session of the WCPFC, in December 2021, the GTA coordinated a collaborative sign-on letter (similar to the IOTC market letter where 61 companies signed-on). The NGO Tuna Forum adopted this and worked with Forum members to seek additional signatories. The resulting [WCPFC sign-on letter](#) with 112 tuna supply chain companies calling for urgent action on harvest strategies was sent to the WCPFC Secretariat and all delegates. Our [press statement](#) was picked up by [The Grocer](#), [Undercurrent](#) and [SeafoodSource](#), [China Fisheries and Seafood Expo](#) and [Industrias Pesqueras](#).

In a first for the GTA, we circulated bespoke social media content for Partners for WCPFC engagement, which accompanied (and complemented) the WCPFC Engagement Resource Pack. This content was provided to share from corporate (and personal) social media platforms helping to amplify the messaging from the GTA to implement comprehensive harvest strategies for tuna in the WCPO.



On 10th November, we presented a SeafoodSource webinar on our WCPFC asks, titled “Western & Central Pacific Ocean Tuna: Don’t Lose the Label”, and on 18th November we held a WCPFC Roundtable. Five WCPFC delegates attended (Australia, Cook Islands, Philippines, Marshal Islands and USA) as well as the UK. The MSC attended and gave a brief overview of the potential certification-loss process. Five GTA partners provided short overviews of their concerns and asks – New England Seafood, Princes, Coop, Morrisons and Waitrose. The full recording (31 minutes) can be viewed [here](#), a 4-minute highlight video can be viewed [here](#), and an even shorter (2 min) version can be viewed [here](#).

We also [wrote](#) to the EU Fisheries Commissioner urging the EU to support a science-manager dialogue meeting (one of our asks) to be held in August alongside the WCPFC Scientific Meeting. Despite agreeing to the terms of reference for this meeting four years ago, the EU are holding up progress by insisting the meeting takes place in December alongside the Commission meeting. To further advocate for this, we produced a blog, which was published on [harveststrategies.org](#), provocatively titled “[It’s Good to Talk – Unless It Clashes with Summer Holidays](#)”.

We were also successful in getting an op-ed [published](#) in China Dialogue. As the only fully bilingual website in English and Chinese focusing on the environment in the world, we were able to target one of the WCPFC countries we felt may be less reluctant to progress harvest strategies.

The WCPFC Commission meeting itself was ultimately disappointing. The majority of the time was spent on debating a new two-year tropical tuna management measure, that ultimately only marginally differs from the old one.

Despite five days of negotiations, delegates were unable to establish workplans for significant tuna stocks, instead opting to delay and extend the timelines for key decisions. The pushback of workplans for yellowfin and bigeye tuna means that it is almost guaranteed that the requirements for certification cannot be met by the 2022 deadline. As a result, the 20 MSC tuna fisheries in the WCPO with yellowfin and bigeye components are still at serious risk of suspension in summer 2023 – with serious consequences for the market.

While we were pleased to see that agreement was finally reached on establishing a scientific-dialogue meeting, considerable work will be required in 2022 to finalise the harvest strategies for skipjack and albacore – and thus maintain their certifications.

Following the meeting, on 14th December 2021, we co-hosted a ‘wash-up’ webinar with Pew to inform, explain and engage key market actors with the outcomes from the WCPFC meeting; in particular the decisions concerning harvest strategies in the WCPO and the impact on MSC certification. We had 89 attendees and the recording can be viewed [here](#).



DON'T LOSE THE LABEL.





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