



# TRAFFIC

## WWF and TRAFFIC

### Joint Position Statement on Bycatch

#### Second Meeting of the Working Party on Bycatch Indian Ocean Tuna Commission Victoria, Seychelles, July 2006

WWF is the world's largest and most experienced independent conservation organisation, with close to five million supporters and a global network active in more than 90 countries.

WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by:

- conserving the world's biological diversity;
- ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable; and
- promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption.

TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade monitoring network, works to ensure that the trade in wild plants and animals is not a threat to the conservation of nature. TRAFFIC is a joint programme of WWF and IUCN-The World Conservation Union.

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WWF and TRAFFIC appreciate the opportunity to provide a statement to the second meeting of the Working Party on Bycatch.

WWF and TRAFFIC would like to acknowledge the significant collective experience and knowledge of the participants in the Working Group and we would like to offer our assistance in pursuing the following issues, which we consider to be priorities:

#### **Implementing International Plans of Action**

WWF and TRAFFIC propose that the FAO International Plans of Action (IPOA) on Seabirds and Sharks, and the FAO Technical Guidelines to Reduce Sea Turtle Mortality in Fishing Operations, be utilised in forming potential mitigation strategies and data collection.

## **Improving data collection and reporting frameworks**

We encourage the participants at this second meeting to adopt a framework through which all Contracting Parties, Cooperating non-Contracting Parties, Entities or Fishing Entities (CPCs) shall report data (for catches of sharks as a priority), in accordance with IOTC data reporting procedures (including available historical data), as well as information on the performance of mitigation measures, and efforts to increase bilateral or multilateral cooperation with other CPCs and regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs). Such reports might best be delivered at the beginning of sessions of relevant meetings.

We are encouraged by the objectives established for this Working Party by the Scientific Committee and, in addition to the specific issues raised in this statement, we would urge participants to consider developing a detailed research plan to assess the impacts of the fishery on broader ecosystems.

## **Expanding observer programmes**

Given that observer programmes are an essential tool in monitoring and assessing bycatch and bycatch mitigation measures, we would encourage participants to implement or extend these programmes as appropriate. The success of the recent resolution on seabird conservation (06/04) will rely to a large extent upon CPCs committing to observer programs. We would also encourage participants to consider how best to develop standardised protocols to enable better collaboration among CPCs, and between RFMOs.

## **Delivering advice despite data scarcity**

WWF and TRAFFIC view bycatch mitigation strategies and management measures, where necessary, as an essential part of ecosystem based management for any fishery. While global estimates of seabird, marine turtle and shark numbers caught as bycatch provide cause for considerable concern, there is very little published data available from the Indian Ocean tuna fisheries, with the possible exception of some South African, Australian and possibly European Commission fisheries. We are concerned that there appears to have been insufficient progress in this regard since the first meeting of the Working Party and urge all CPCs to invest in the collection of high quality data because without it, the work of the Working Party and the Scientific Committee will necessarily be compromised and the reputation of the IOTC as a whole will be further diminished.

While we appreciate the challenges that face this new working party in developing a workplan, it must also be remembered that the IOTC is not a new RFMO and that the collection of quality data on bycatch and the investment in research on the ecosystem effects of fishing activities are fundamental to responsible fisheries management. Therefore, we would applaud endeavours by CPCs to show leadership through contributions of research to underpin responsible ecosystem based fisheries management in the area of competence of the IOTC.

## Focusing on elasmobranchs

TRAFFIC and WWF are particularly concerned with the levels of catch of sharks at a global level. These concerns were recently articulated by Lack, M. and Sant, G., “World shark catch, production and trade 1990-2003” (Australian Government and TRAFFIC, 2006), available at: <http://www.deh.gov.au/coasts/publications/trends-shark.html>

We would also draw the attention of members to the current work on the matters raised above through CITES (see: <http://www.cites.org/eng/com/AC/22/index.shtml>.)

We share the concern of many scientists about the lack of data collected and/or publicly available on the catch and bycatch of elasmobranchs throughout the Indian Ocean. To a large degree, the resolution on sharks at IOTC 9 (05/05) reflects implicitly the urgency of this concern. The inadequacy of research and monitoring activity targeted at elasmobranchs and the consequent lack of data on which to base assessments of threat, to identify critical habitats and to make recommendations for sustainable harvesting strategies, currently makes it challenging to manage sharks within the Indian Ocean.

Adopting strong adaptive management measures in the short term implies that adjustments in the medium to long term can be made when better information becomes available.

We believe that given the inherent constraints posed by the problem of data scarcity, scientists are best placed to provide advice that will inform the implementation of appropriate precautionary measures. Part of the advice will no doubt point to practical steps to develop effective data collection processes, but given the ongoing and intensive effort in the fishery, advice on the fate of bycatch species under various catch scenarios, and on workable mitigation measures is essential.

We also believe that the resolution on sharks (05/05) reiterates the importance of scientific advice on stock assessments of key bycatch species and provides a useful platform for the consideration of the Working Party. Furthermore, we believe that this reflects the widely held opinion that the shortage of scientific data should not delay the implementation of management interventions.

We strongly encourage this second meeting of the Working Party on Bycatch to take this opportunity to generate at least preliminary advice upon which the IOTC will be able to take firm management action. While we appreciate the difficulties inherent in this task, WWF and TRAFFIC are concerned that CPCs may not be investing sufficiently in research that will be essential for consideration by scientists in the Working Party. We make this statement in the context of paragraph two of resolution 05/05 which states: **“In 2006 the Scientific Committee (in collaboration with the Working Party on Bycatch) provide (sic) advice on the stock status of key shark species and propose a research plan and timeline for a comprehensive assessment of these stocks.”**

We would also reiterate our encouragement of the Working Party to be guided by the FAO IPOA-Sharks. For example, while we are encouraged that the resolution on sharks (05/05) makes specific reference to shark finning, we urge participants at this Working Party meeting to provide advice to the IOTC as to whether the resolution will adequately address this issue, particularly in light of the implementation of this important aspect of FAO IPOA-Sharks.

### **Providing specific advice on turtles**

WWF and TRAFFIC acknowledge the progress made in IOTC 9, manifest through the recommendation on sea turtles and information brought to the table by CPCs at IOTC 10.

We urge participants at this second meeting of the Working Party on Bycatch to consider turtle conservation measures that will encourage CPCs to pass an effective resolution on sea turtle conservation at IOTC 11 in 2007.

We believe the strong scientific presence at the Working Party meeting will provide a solid platform upon which a comprehensive risk assessment can be made of the impact on turtles of different gear types and fishing practices in the Indian Ocean. We acknowledge that significant efforts have been made in some areas and that greater collaboration will see practical and effective mitigation measures adopted more widely. We also understand that the outcomes of trials of new forms of gear such as circle hooks in other fisheries will be a significant relevance to the Indian Ocean and we encourage further collaboration.

- **FADs**

We hope that the meeting will be able to provide specific guidance on assessing the impact of fish aggregating devices (FADs) on turtles. We have been informed that juvenile turtles have become caught in the 'raft' structure (and in the netting) of some FADs used in the Western Indian Ocean, in particular. We believe that some fleets have sought to redesign FADs to reduce their impacts; action which we would applaud but that we have not yet been able to verify. We encourage all scientists who may have knowledge of the threat of FADs and of mitigation trials to use this first meeting of the Working Party to share their experiences and acknowledge, once again, the information provided at IOTC 10.

We also hope the Working Party will seek to implement research programs that will reduce elasmobranch bycatch in the purse-seine fishery.

### **Delivering stronger resolutions on seabirds**

WWF and TRAFFIC acknowledge the resolution on seabird conservation (06/04) made at IOTC 10. However, given our concerns about the very real threat to seabird populations from fisheries in the area of competence of the IOTC, we believe that this resolution should be seen very much as a starting point.

We trust that the Working Party on Bycatch will monitor closely the effectiveness of resolution 06/04 to inform further resolutions which will be needed in the near future to arrest the decline of seabird populations. We would call on the Working Party to examine, in particular, the impact of the exemption for fishers targeting swordfish using the “American longline system.”

The paucity of data on interactions between fishing fleets covered by the IOTC and seabirds is a major problem and goes to the issue of the low level of observer programs among many CPCs. Given that the credibility of resolutions such as 06/04 rests to a large degree on independently verifiable data, WWF and TRAFFIC would support strongly a call for more extensive observer programs from participants at this Working Party meeting. Without such programs, we are concerned that the Working Party and the Scientific Committee will be unable to provide the advice necessary to underpin responsible and informed management of IOTC fisheries.

We urge participants at the meeting to seek opportunities to work closely with other RFMOs on seabird bycatch mitigation. To this end, for example, we understand that the secretariat of the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) has written to the IOTC seeking to increase collaboration. We applaud this initiative and look forward to practical outcomes from this and other similar interactions.

### **Conclusion and an invitation to further collaboration**

WWF and TRAFFIC would like to encourage scientists at this second meeting of the Working Party on Bycatch to take advantage of the sense of urgency so strongly expressed at IOTC 9 and 10. Cogent advice on the levels of risk to species and ecosystems, and on effective bycatch mitigation measures, will provide an essential platform for the next phase of the IOTC’s revitalisation. However, further delays in the provision of data by responsible CPCs will exacerbate the formidable challenges that already face the Working Party in providing advice and will attract further criticism of the IOTC’s performance.

Finally, we would like to encourage participants to consider working with us to implement bycatch mitigation trials and other conservation initiatives. For example, WWF has implemented such practices with a range of partners, including the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration of the United States, local fishing industry partners and governments. Another example is the translation into a variety of languages of guidelines on marine species identification and bycatch mitigation (such as the translations of the “Catch fish not turtles” brochure). This work has only been possible through working in collaboration with a variety of partners. There is the potential to form similar partnerships with IOTC member states, fishing fleets and research organisations in the Indian Ocean.

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