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منظمة
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COORDINATING WORKING PARTY ON FISHERY STATISTICS

Intersessional Meetings of Aquaculture and Fisheries Subject Groups Joint Session

Eighth Meeting of the Aquaculture Subject Group (AS) and Thirty meeting of the Fisheries Subject Group (FS)

28-30 June 2023

Meeting place: Hybrid - NEAFC headquarters
London, United Kingdom/Zoom

Relevant activities carried out by IOTC during the intersessional period
(July 2022-June 2023)

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1. Introduction

The Indian Ocean Tuna Commission ([IOTC](#)) is an intergovernmental organisation responsible for the management of tuna and tuna-like species in the Indian Ocean. Its main objective is to promote cooperation among [Contracting Parties \(Members\) and Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties](#) (CPCs), with a view to ensuring, through appropriate management, the conservation and sustainable exploitation of the stocks covered by the organisation's establishing [Agreement](#).

The Commission has four key functions and responsibilities which enable it to achieve its objectives. They are drawn from the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and are:

- to **keep under review the conditions and trends of the stocks** and to gather, analyse, and disseminate scientific information, catch and effort statistics and other data relevant to the conservation and management of the stocks and to fisheries based on the stocks;
- to encourage, recommend, and **coordinate research and development activities in respect of the stocks and fisheries** covered by the IOTC, and such other activities as the Commission may decide appropriate (such as transfer of technology, training and enhancement) having due regard to the need to ensure the equitable participation of Members of the Commission in the fisheries and the special interests and needs of Members in the region that are developing countries;
- to **adopt – on the basis of scientific evidence – [Conservation and Management Measures](#)** (CMM) to ensure the conservation of the stocks covered by the Agreement and to promote the objective of their optimum utilisation throughout the [IOTC Area of competence](#);
- to **keep under review the economic and social aspects of the fisheries** based on the stocks covered by the Agreement bearing in mind, in particular, the interests of developing coastal States.

2. Review of relevant IOTC activities since CWP-27 (2022)

A. IMPROVEMENT IN THE QUALITY AND TIMELINESS OF STATISTICAL DATA SUBMITTED BY CPCS

[[SDG 14.4](#)¹] Late or incomplete reporting of the main IOTC statistical data sets (i.e., retained annual catches and discards, catch and effort, and size-frequency data as per [IOTC Resolution 15/02](#)) compromises the data validation and verification process performed by the IOTC Secretariat, affecting the input data for stock assessments and therefore management advice based on these. Several activities aimed at improving both the timeliness and the quality of the reported information have been performed since CWP-27, including:

- Finalising a set of new IOTC data reporting forms and guidelines ([IOTC 2022f](#)), including a revised definition of IOTC fisheries more closely aligned with CWP standards ([IOTC 2022e](#));
- Further progressing with the introduction of a submission-based feedback report approach, aimed at providing close to real time summary information on the quality and completeness of the data sets submitted by members to the Secretariat ([IOTC 2022f](#));
- Trialling the FAO matrix approach for the characterization of fisheries among selected IOTC CPCs ([IOTC 2022g](#));
- Providing ad hoc support to CPCs transitioning towards more streamlined data collection and management workflows, to facilitate the reporting of mandatory data according to IOTC requirements;
- Revising historical time series of fisheries operating in the IOTC region, in collaboration with FAO and national stakeholders (e.g., Iranian gillnet and gillnet-offshore fisheries, Indonesian industrial and artisanal fisheries, etc.);
- Contributing to the annual EU DCF Liaison Meeting (September 2022);
- Contributing to the FAO workshop on fisheries data collection and statistics (September 2022);
- Delivering the 3rd and 4th sessions of the IOTC ad hoc *Working Group on Fish Aggregating Devices* ([WGFAD03](#), [WGFAD04](#)), in October 2022 and May 2023 respectively, with a view at improving and streamlining the provision of data assets related to the use of drifting fish aggregating devices (dFADs), including discussions on the standardisation of classifications and nomenclature, and long-term plan for the management of daily buoy positions and the introduction of a dFAD registry;
- Rolling-out the e-MARIS platform, a comprehensive tool to support IOTC CPCs with the electronic reporting of statistical data (among others).

B. SUPPORT TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE IOTC REGIONAL OBSERVER SCHEME (ROS)

[[SDG 14.4](#)] [IOTC Resolution 22/04](#) (*On a Regional Observer Scheme*, 2022) aims at collecting verified catch data and other scientific information related to the fisheries for tuna and tuna-like species in the IOTC area of competence. Since its inception, implementation of the ROS has remained very low among CPCs due to a number of different factors.

With the entry in force of [IOTC Resolution 16/04](#) (*On the implementation of a pilot project in view of promoting the Regional Observer Scheme of IOTC*, 2016) a number of initiatives to promote and support scientific observer data collection and reporting have been carried on by the IOTC Secretariat, including:

- Completing the work on the EU-funded project for the preparation and delivery of training and support material for the ROS pilot programme;
- Finalising standard data reporting forms for the provision of multiple observer trip data collected from industrial longline and purse seine fisheries ([IOTC 2022i](#));
- Further developing a set of electronic tools to facilitate data collection, management and reporting of ROS data at national and regional level (i.e., ROS e-tools, developed in collaboration with the US [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#), [World Wildlife Fund](#), and the [Sustainable Indian Ocean Tuna Initiative](#) Fisheries Improvement Project);

¹ SDG 14.4 : *By 2020, effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing practices and implement science-based management plans, in order to restore fish stocks in the shortest time possible, at least to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield as determined by their biological characteristics*

- Progressing with the incorporation in the IOTC databases of historical observer data previously reported either through hard-copy or with electronic formats unsuitable for automated data processing;
- Completing the work on the pilot project for the deployment of electronic monitoring systems on-board coastal gillnet and gillnet / longline vessels in Sri Lanka;
- Finalising the minimum standards for designing and implementing Electronic Monitoring Systems in Indian Ocean tuna fisheries (in collaboration with the [International Sustainable Seafood Foundation](#));
- Organising the 3rd session of the IOTC ad hoc *Working Group on the development of Electronic Monitoring programme Standards* ([WGEMS03](#)) in March 2023.

C. CAPACITY BUILDING ACTIVITIES

[**SDG 14.4, SDG 14.A²**] Delivering activities in support of developing coastal states is one of the main goals and functions of the IOTC Secretariat. Capacity building has been provided to members either directly by the Secretariat or in collaboration with external partners (e.g., *Overseas Fishery Cooperation Foundation of Japan*, *European Commission's Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries*, etc.) in different fields such as data compliance and technical support missions and joint projects implementation (e.g., IOTC-OFCE).

On-the-field activities in the intersessional period have slowly resumed after the CoViD-19 pandemic, although some were replaced – where possible and appropriate – with remote meetings. These activities mainly concerned:

- Delivering three in-person meetings to Indonesia (Jakarta and Bali, July and November 2022, March 2023) to discuss the current state-of-the-art in terms of national procedures for the estimation of annual catches, improve the current fishing fleet characterisation, and evaluate proposals for the re-estimation of species composition for artisanal and small-scale fisheries. Furthermore, identify and resolve the causes of marked discrepancies detected between official data reported to FAO and IOTC;
- Preparing a technical data compliance and support mission to Tanzania (July 2023), to review and understand the methodologies and systems adopted for data collection, data entry and data processing currently in place in the country, and identify the causes explaining the fluctuations and inconsistencies detected in recent data submissions to the IOTC Secretariat;
- Preparing the background material to support the delivery of two regional workshops (Q3-Q4 2023) targeting western / eastern Indian Ocean coastal countries, with the purpose of clarifying the revised IOTC data reporting methodologies (expected to enter in force in 2024) and further increase the level of compliance of all concerned CPCs.

D. IMPROVEMENT IN THE DISSEMINATION OF ALL RELEVANT DATA SETS AND RELATED ASSETS

[**SDG 14.A**] All information received, validated, managed and produced by the IOTC Secretariat (e.g., statistical data sets, stock assessment input files, scientific documents and reports) is usually disseminated through the IOTC website, in a relatively unstructured and non-interoperable way that does not yet fully comply with the FAIR principles (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable).

Several initiatives from the IOTC Secretariat have been put in place since CWP-27 to ensure that access to all publicly available IOTC assets of scientific relevance can be streamlined and improved, by:

- Streamlining the dissemination of [reference data](#) and [updated datasets](#) through the IOTC website;
- Adopting the TG-RH guidelines for the compilation of annual updates to the FIRMS Global Tuna Atlas;
- Leveraging Global Tuna Atlas data as a benchmark to compare IOTC fisheries with global fisheries for all species concerned ([IOTC. 2022a,b,c,d](#));
- Disseminating scientific observer information through the ROS regional database ([IOTC. 2022h](#));
- Adopting the TG-catch *retained* catches nomenclature in official documents / dissemination products

² SDG 14.A - Increase scientific knowledge, develop research capacity and transfer marine technology, taking into account the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission Criteria and Guidelines on the Transfer of Marine Technology, in order to improve ocean health and to enhance the contribution of marine biodiversity to the development of developing countries, in particular small island developing States and least developed countries

- Providing feedback to the CWP *ad-hoc* task groups on *reference harmonisation* (TG-RH), *catch* (TG-catch) and *effort* (TG-effort) concepts, *geospatial matters* (TG-geospatial), and *small-scale fisheries* (TG-SSF);
- Promoting and further increasing the level of adoption of CWP standards (e.g., grid aerial systems, ISSCFG, ASFIS, etc.) through their incorporation within all IOTC public datasets;
- Creating and disseminating a publicly accessible [IOTC reference data catalogue](#);
- Providing feedback to the FIRMS ad hoc *Technical Working Group on the Global Tuna Atlas*, including further through trials of the CWP TG-RH guidelines for data provisions of level 0 data sets to the FIRMS Global Tuna Atlas.

E. OTHER SCIENCE AND COMPLIANCE-RELATED ACTIVITIES

The IOTC Secretariat is also involved in other sub-projects and activities that do not necessarily fall into the categories above, yet are of relevance to the CWP audience, namely:

- [**SDG 14.C**] Updating the IOTC Record of Authorised Vessels (RAV) as well as the IOTC list of IUU-Vessels and the list of Authorised Supply Vessels (as per [IOTC Resolution 18/03](#));
- [**SDG 14.C**] Manage the information collected through the e-PSM platform, an IOTC-specific electronic implementation of the Port State Measures Agreement;
- [**SDG 14.4**] Maintain the IO-RTTP database, containing the tagging information collected through the Regional Tuna Tagging Program;

3. References

IOTC 2022a. *Review of the statistical data available for Indian Ocean neritic tuna and seerfish species*, Virtual meeting, 04-08 July 2022. p. 36. Available from <https://www.iotc.org/documents/WPNT/12/07>

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IOTC 2022d. *Overview of Indian Ocean tropical tuna fisheries*, Virtual meeting, 24-29 October 2022. p. 43. Available from <https://www.iotc.org/documents/WPTT/24/03a>

IOTC 2022e. *Proposed updates to the definition of fisheries in support of the reporting of statistical data to the IOTC*, Victoria, Seychelles, 28 November 2022 - 02 December 2022. p. 13. Available from <https://www.iotc.org/documents/WPDCS/18/13>

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IOTC 2022h. *Updates on the implementation of the IOTC Regional Observer Scheme and its Pilot Project*, Victoria, Seychelles, 28 November 2022 - 02 December 2022. p. 22. Available from <https://www.iotc.org/documents/WPDCS/18/10>

IOTC 2022i. *Finalised ROS data reporting forms for purse seine and longline fisheries*, Victoria, Seychelles, 28 November 2022 - 02 December 2022. p. 5. Available from <https://www.iotc.org/documents/WPDCS/18/17>