

OUTCOMES OF THE 23rd SESSION OF THE COMMISSION

PREPARED BY: IOTC SECRETARIAT, 31 JULY 2019

PURPOSE

To inform participants at the 15th Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch (WPEB15) of the decisions and requests made by the Commission at its 23rd Session, held from 17 – 21 June 2019, specifically relating to the work of the WPEB.

BACKGROUND

At the 23rd Session, the Commission **CONSIDERED** and **ADOPTED** 7 proposals as Conservation and Management Measures (consisting of 7 Resolutions and 0 Recommendations), as detailed below:

Resolutions

- Resolution 19/01 *On an interim plan for rebuilding the Indian Ocean yellowfin tuna stock in the IOTC Area of competence.*
- Resolution 19/02 *Procedures on a fish aggregating devices (FADs) management plan, including a limitation on the number of fads, more detailed specifications of catch reporting from fad sets, and the development of improved fad designs to reduce the incidence of entanglement of non-target species.*
- Resolution 19/03 *On the conservation of mobulid species caught in association with fisheries in the IOTC Area of Competence.*
- Resolution 19/04 *Concerning the IOTC Record of Vessels Authorised to operate in the IOTC Area of Competence.*
- Resolution 19/05 *On a ban on discards of bigeye tuna, skipjack tuna, yellowfin tuna, and non-targeted species caught by purse seine vessels in the IOTC Area of Competence.*
- Resolution 19/06 *On establishing a programme for transshipment by large-scale fishing vessels.*
- Resolution 19/07 *On vessel chartering in the IOTC Area of Competence.*

These Conservation and Management Measures shall become binding 120 days after their distribution to all CPCs. The final versions of the newly agreed CMMs will be made available here in due course: <http://iotc.org/cmms>.

DISCUSSION

The Commission also made a number of general comments on the recommendations made by the Scientific Committee in 2018, which have relevance for the WPEB.

Status of sharks

The Commission noted the current status of the following sharks:

Blue shark

Blue shark is assessed to be not overfished or subject to overfishing. If the catches are reduced at least 10%, the probability of maintaining stock biomass above MSY reference levels ($B > B_{MSY}$) over the next 8 years will be increased.

Oceanic whitetip shark

No quantitative stock assessment is currently available for oceanic whitetip shark. The population status remains uncertain.

The Commission **NOTED** that the submission of complete, accurate and timely catch records disaggregated by species for sharks and other bycatch species remains low and that this reduces the ability of the Scientific Committee to provide informed management advice for these species.

The Commission **NOTED** the concern expressed by the Scientific Committee regarding the status of mobulid rays. Although the recommendations on gear modifications made by the Scientific Committee relate mainly gillnet fisheries, there is also a need to monitor mobulid interactions with other gears and fleets and reduce their associated mortality.

The Commission **RECALLED** its requests in 2018 to the Compliance Committee and Scientific Committee (IOTC-2018-S22-R, paragraph 39):

- to analyse and document, wherever possible, whether the practice of shark finning still takes place in IOTC and to what extent, despite the adoption of Resolution 17/05, and to review the compliance with the requirements contained in Res 17/05, including the shark finning prohibition and the fins naturally attached requirement adopted by IOTC (Compliance Committee);
- to identify possible means to improve the submission of complete, accurate and timely catch records for sharks, as well as the collection of species-specific data on catch, biology, discards and trade. (Scientific Committee).

The Commission **NOTED** that in 2019 the WPICMM considered the results of an analysis on the status of compliance with the shark measures. The WPICMM noted there is currently a lack of data to undertake any meaningful assessment on how CPCs are implementing these measures. In 2018, both the WPDCS and SC discussed possible means to improve the submission of complete, accurate and timely catch records for sharks. This matter has been deferred to the next meeting of the WPEB, noting that the focus would be on data improvement.

Consideration of management measures related to ecosystems, bycatch and sharks

The Commission **ADOPTED** IOTC Resolution 19/03 *On the conservation of mobulid species caught in association with fisheries in the IOTC Area of Competence*.

The complete report of the 23rd Session of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission is not yet available for download from the IOTC website.

RECOMMENDATION/S

That the WPEB:

- 1) **NOTE** paper IOTC–2019–WPEB15–04 which outlined the outcomes of the 23rd Session of the Commission, specifically related to the work of the WPEB and **AGREE** to consider how best to provide the SC with the information it needs, in order to satisfy the Commission’s requests, throughout the course of the current WPEB meeting.
- 2) **NOTE** the 7 Conservation and Management Measures (CMMs) adopted at the 23rd Session of the Commission (consisting of 7 Resolutions and 0 Recommendations).