

Joint Statement on Indian Ocean Yellowfin Tuna by the Global Tuna Alliance, the Tuna Protection Alliance and WWF.

The above organisations believe that effective management and healthy fish stocks is a collective responsibility and commitment, and failure and the consequences that come from it are also collective. We recognise that as far as possible, all Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) members and fishing gear-types are required to play their part in delivering yellowfin tuna catch reductions going forwards.

Indian Ocean yellowfin tuna has been overfished since 2015. From 2016-2020 average catches of yellowfin tuna (434,383 tonnes) were determined to be above the estimated maximum sustainable yield (MSY) level of 403,000 tonnes. In June 2021, IOTC delegates agreed on an interim rebuilding plan for overfished yellowfin tuna. The measure, resolution 21/01, provided a robust framework on catch reductions and proposed an overall total allowable catch of 401,011 tonnes. However as of January 2022, this measure was weakened with formal objections submitted by six countries, putting the interim rebuilding plan at serious risk of failure.

In December 2021, the new stock assessment presented in the IOTC Scientific Committee revealed that Indian Ocean yellowfin tuna continues to be overfished with overfishing occurring, and the MSY estimate for the Indian Ocean stock was recalculated as 349,000 tonnes. This is significantly below the catch limit of the interim rebuilding plan (resolution 21/01). Furthermore, the scientific advice in 2021 showed that if 2020 catch levels were reduced by 30%, there is a more than 67% probability of rebuilding the stock by 2030. This equates to a yellowfin catch at 302,837 tonnes.

At the 26th Session of the IOTC in May 2022, two approaches for addressing yellowfin overfishing were tabled, but some countries objected to both without offering alternatives or a rationale. This despite the calls from scientists, consumers, NGOs and retailers for a catch reduction on yellowfin. Many countries did agree to take considerable cuts, but were frustrated with the lack of compromise from others.

We are concerned that discussions are stymied by polarised views: distant-water fishing nations versus coastal states and small-island developing states, small scale versus large scale,



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and gear types against gear types. This divisive narrative is derailing constructive dialogue and compromise, and leading to misuse of objections. The road to recovery for Indian Ocean yellowfin tuna will require dramatic reductions over a period of two generations – 10 years. If no action is taken, reduction targets will dramatically increase year after year. Therefore, it is necessary to work collaboratively and be willing to make compromises for the long-term sustainability of the stocks, securing livelihoods and ensuring food security for millions of people in the Indian Ocean.

Meanwhile, consumers prefer to purchase their seafood from sustainable sources, and the market is looking for progress to be made. Tuna processors and retailers have undeniable purchasing power as well as multiple sourcing options. Their sourcing policies require them to look for well-managed fisheries. In the current situation, Indian Ocean yellowfin risks becoming an unattractive proposition for market actors who wish to source tuna responsibly.

Given the consistent overfishing and overfished status of the Indian Ocean yellowfin tuna stock since 2015, the Global Tuna Alliance, the Tuna Protection Alliance, WWF and their participating market partners strongly urge the IOTC in the coming meeting in May 2023 to:

- **Agree a 30% cut in catch relative to 2020 levels to stop yellowfin overfishing;**
- **Agree a resolution that specifies how the yellowfin stock could be rebuilt in two generations;**
- **Revise the IOTC Treaty to prevent spurious use of objections.**

The issue of yellowfin tuna needs to be taken seriously. The market can no longer wait patiently for the IOTC to act responsibly; they are now setting deadlines with **clear consequences** of inaction and/or irresponsible decision-making.



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