



**MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING
ON THE CONSERVATION AND
MANAGEMENT OF MARINE TURTLES
AND THEIR HABITATS OF THE INDIAN
OCEAN AND SOUTH-EAST ASIA**

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10TH MEETING OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Pattaya, Thailand, 31 March-3 April 2024
Agenda Item 6.2

INDIAN OCEAN TUNA COMMISSION (IOTC) AND OTHER RFMOS

(Prepared by the Secretariat)

1. Bycatch in fisheries – both industrial and artisanal – remains one of the greatest threats to marine turtles worldwide. Accordingly, there is a great need to work together with other organizations and key players that can help tackle that problem. Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) are important partners when it comes to addressing bycatch. They are international organizations formed by countries with fishing interests in an area and are open both to countries in the region (coastal states) and countries with interests in the fisheries concerned.
2. RFMOs manage specific fisheries within certain ocean areas, typically achieved through legally-binding conservation and management measures (CMMs). The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) recognizes 61 Regional Fisheries Bodies (RFBs), which have varying mandates and functions (e.g. advisory, coordination, management), and all those with a management mandate are considered RFMOs. Five RFMOs manage tuna and tuna-like fisheries, while others manage non-tuna fisheries, such as deep-sea fisheries and more coastal fisheries.
3. As shown in Figure 1, directly relevant to the IOSEA region are the following:
 - Indian Ocean Tuna Commission ([IOTC](#)) – focusing on gillnet, purse seine, longline, handline, pole-and-line, trolling and trawl fisheries for temperate and tropical tuna (albacore, yellowfin, bigeye, and skipjack), billfish (swordfish, black marlin, blue marlin, striped marlin, Indo-Pacific sailfish), neritic tuna and mackerels (bullet tuna, frigate tuna, kawakawa, longtail tuna, Indo-Pacific king mackerel, narrow-barred Spanish mackerel)
 - Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement ([SIOFA](#)) – focusing on with bottom trawl, longline, pot, and gillnet fisheries for armourhead, Patagonian toothfish, oreo, orange roughy, dogfish, and alfonsino
 - Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna ([CCSBT](#)) – exclusively concerned with management of this one species, fished with longlines or purse seine
 - Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission ([WCPFC](#)) – focusing on purse seine, longline, pole and line, troll, and other small-scale fishing methods (e.g., handline, small traps) for Pacific bluefin tuna, tropical tuna (bigeye, skipjack, yellowfin), albacore, billfish (marlin and swordfish), oceanic sharks

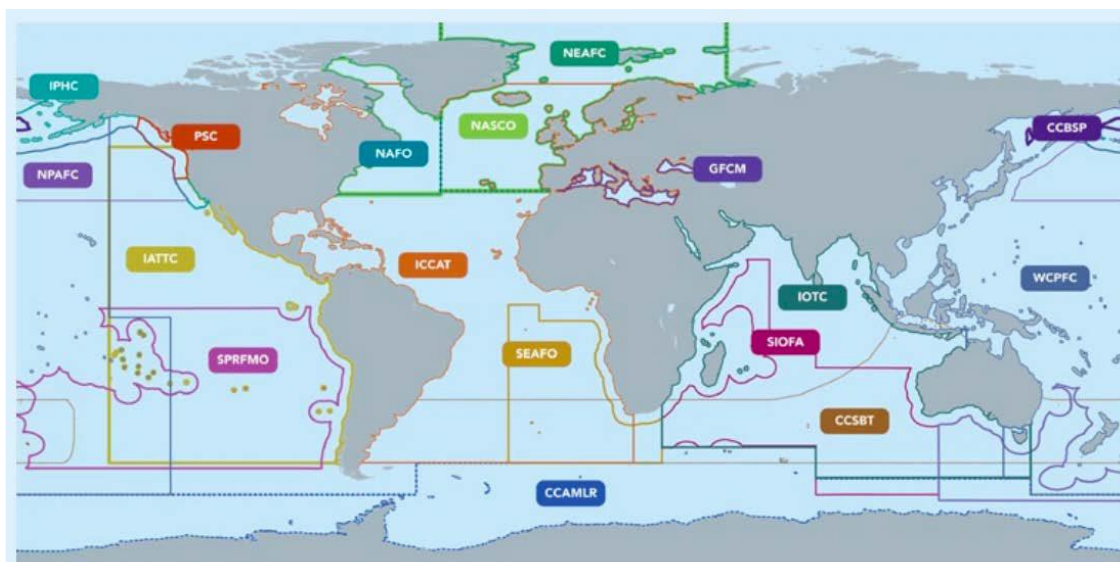


Figure 1: Map of Global Regional Fishery Bodies, including RFMOs (Source: The Pew Environment Group)

4. The Work Programme 2020-2024 identified a number of activities that should be implemented with or by RFMOs:
- #22 – Continue national and/or regional bycatch mitigation programmes for industrial and artisanal fisheries (including gear modification, TEDs, and improved fishing practices to reduce bycatch).
 - #23 – Identify high priority areas, stocks and fisheries for establishing additional bycatch mitigation programmes.
 - #24 – Establish national observer, assessment and quantification programmes to assess the impact on different turtle life stages and populations.
 - #25 – Ensure that concerns related to sources of turtle mortality are presented at IOTC Meetings/ especially WPEB (e.g. including FADs and gill nets, based on new information that comes to light):
 - a) initiate dialogue on current issues of concern among Signatories and IOTC members in advance of each IOTC meeting (including subsidiary bodies)
 - b) continue to contribute to the IOTC Executive Summary on marine turtles
 - c) AC Members and National Focal Points to communicate important issues to members of national delegations attending IOTC in advance of each IOTC meeting
 - d) Signatories (especially if FPs are the same) to promote the cause of turtles in IOTC meetings, and to communicate issues with Secretariat and others for information.
 - #65 – Encourage the participation of RFMOs and other relevant bodies (e.g. IOTC, ASCLME, IOC, SWIOFP, SEAFDEC, CTI) in the Marine Turtle Task Forces (MTTF) or other subregional meetings.
 - #73 – Request RFMOs to gather information and report on the occurrence, distribution and take of marine turtles in oceanic areas.
 - #74 – Revive efforts to conclude a cooperation agreement with IOTC on marine turtles.
 - #75 – Engage with WCPFC to identify options for collaboration.
 - #93 – Engage with the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission, the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, and the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI), as well as other RFMOs relevant to the IOSEA, to reach out to non-Signatory States

with fleets fishing in the IOSEA region (e.g. China / Taiwan, Japan, Republic of Korea, Spain etc).

Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC)

5. This document provides an update since the last overview provided in CMS/IOSEA/MOS8/Doc.10.3 [Developments in Relevant Regional Fisheries Management Organizations \(RFMOs\)](#).
6. No new Conservation and Management Measures (CMMs) directly related to marine turtles were adopted by the IOTC since the previous update. An overview of all relevant CMMs currently in force was prepared by the IOTC Secretariat for the WPEB19 Meeting in 2023 (available [here](#)).

Cooperation Agreement

7. As requested in Work Programme Activity #74, efforts to conclude a cooperation agreement with IOTC on marine turtles were revived and the Secretariat engaged actively with the IOTC through its Secretariat and Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch (WPEB), as well as the Scientific Committee. Following presentation and discussion at the WPEB17 and WPEB18 Meetings in 2021 and 2022, the WPEB agreed to forward the draft cooperation agreement to the 25th Session of the Scientific Committee in December 2022, from where it was referred to the 27th Session of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission In May 2023. Approval was given for the Agreement to be signed, thus formalizing the long-standing informal cooperation between the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU and the IOTC.
8. Crucial in this process was the active support of Signatory States that are also Members of the IOTC, who helped to overcome the hesitation of a non-Signatory State to enter into this agreement.
9. The [page on the MOU website](#) dealing with cooperation with RFMOs has been updated accordingly and the Cooperation Agreement has been uploaded there.
10. In August 2023, the Secretariats of IOTC and the MOU met online to discuss practical next steps. Some key topics for which the specialized input of the MOU would be beneficial for IOTC processes were identified:
 - a) The WPEB19 Meeting in September 2023 (report available [here](#)) discussed the [Review of the statistical data available for IOTC bycatch species](#). The paper shows clearly the poor quality and quantity of data available with regard to turtle (and other protected species) bycatch. Support in improving that situation was requested from MOU Focal Points.
 - b) The last Ecological Risk Assessment for turtles within the IOTC framework was undertaken in 2018 by CSIRO (*Assessment of the Vulnerability of Sea Turtles to IOTC Tuna Fisheries*, available [here](#)). Previously, in 2012, an [Ecological Risk Assessment and Productivity - Susceptibility Analysis of sea turtles overlapping with fisheries in the IOTC region](#) had been produced in cooperation between IOTC and the MOU. Given the data scarcity, there are doubts that ERAs are the best way forward, and an exchange of views is encouraged.
 - c) The WPEB19 Meeting was scheduled to review the indicators for sea turtles, however, due to a lack of presented information and limited presence of sea turtle

experts in the meeting this was postponed until next year. It was decided that the Chair and IOTC Secretariat would reach out to experts to assist with this in 2024. This presents an important opportunity to provide input, which IOTC Members and the MOU Advisory Committee should consider prioritizing.

- d) [Resolution 12/04 On the conservation of marine turtles](#), dating from 2012, is still the current marine-turtle related decision. Each year, in the context of the [Review of Conservation and Management Measures relevant to ecosystems and bycatch](#), there is a chance to submit comments and recommendations for its revision. The AC could be asked to support Signatory States in reviewing the resolution and providing comments.
 - e) The *Executive Summary: Marine Turtles* ([Appendix XIV of the WPEB19 Report](#)) produced by the WPEB received some minor updates in 2023, but has not been thoroughly reviewed and updated for several years. This, too, presents an important opportunity for the MOU, through its AC and Secretariat, to ensure up to date information and advice is available.
11. The suggestions and requests listed in paragraph 10 all relate to data and information needs identified by the IOTC, or required for their processes. In addition, Signatories and AC Members should consider whether any other matters should be brought to the attention of the WPEB, and how best to achieve the exchange and collaboration foreseen in the Work Programme.

Gillnet Bycatch Mitigation

12. In 2022, organized by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) in collaboration with the IOTC and the MOU Secretariats, a technical [Multi-Taxa Gillnet Bycatch Mitigation Workshop](#) was held. The objective of the workshop was to undertake an evaluation of existing mitigation measures for their sustainability to reduce bycatch of multiple taxa in drift/gillnet fisheries (gears) and to scope and assess the feasibility of novel or experimental measures being developed for this purpose in the Indian Ocean. The workshop successfully identified a suite of options, which may be ready to test/pilot and/or scale mitigation measures which benefit multi-taxa, with a focus on having improved monitoring and data collection systems in place so information from such trials is robust and scientific. The report contains a list of recommendations to the WPEB which were discussed at WPEB18 in 2022.
13. Specifically, the workshop explored a suite of options, a mitigation toolbox, for reducing the bycatch of sharks and rays, cetaceans, sea turtles among other species, and allowing for a robust exchange of information on the results of the trials being undertaken in other parts of the world for small-scale and large-scale gillnet fisheries. Among these, net illumination, the use of different gear settings (surface, subsurface), use of acoustic deterrents, magnetic or electric fields, and area-based measures were discussed.
14. It was noted that there is a real need to improve data from gillnet fisheries for both target and non-target species and the workshop largely agreed that the best way of collecting data from gillnet fisheries (whether small or large-scale) is to focus on scientific observers. However, the WPEB confirmed that there was currently no requirement for onboard scientific observers for vessels which are less than 24 m and for those only operating within areas of national jurisdiction which could be something to be explored in the future to provide a potential solution to the lack of data in these fisheries.
15. The use of artificial lights (a visual deterrent) in gillnet fisheries as a potential bycatch mitigation device was discussed at length and there was strong support for the rolling

out of future LED trials across the Indian Ocean by the workshop participants.

16. Other recommendations from the workshop related to: studying the validity of alternative data collection tools; providing support for trials of sub-surface setting across the wider Indian Ocean; continuing discussions around providing a way to report the setting depth of gillnets; strengthening of discards data collection mechanisms on board vessels; the study of at-vessel and post-release mortality for those species currently under retention bans; and continued support for the development of Ecological Risk Assessments, and the use of Important Marine Mammal Areas, Important Bird Areas, EBSAs and other tools that highlight important or sensitive habitat for ETP species.

Other RFMOs

17. No outreach to the Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement ([SIOFA](#)), the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna ([CCSBT](#)) or the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission ([WCPFC](#)) has been made since MOS8.
18. For MOS9, an update on decisions made by these RFMOs since the last overview provided in CMS/IOSEA/MOS8/Doc.10.3 [Developments in Relevant Regional Fisheries Management Organizations \(RFMOs\)](#), if any, will be prepared.
19. More importantly, however, there is a need to review in more detail the overlap of the activities managed by these RFMOs with turtle populations covered by IOSEA, the data availability, level of information available, nature of the discussions in these fora and potential for collaboration.

Action requested of AC10:

- Review the recommendations for input to IOTC processes presented in paragraphs 10 and 11, discuss how these could be addressed and how the activities could be reflected in the Work Programme 2024-2028
- Review the recommendations contained in the report of the Multi-Taxa Gillnet Bycatch Mitigation Workshop and how the activities could be reflected in the Work Programme 2024-2028
- Advise on a review of the potential for collaboration with SIOFA, CCSBT and WCPFC for inclusion in the Work Programme 2024-2028