

Position Statement of FPAOI for the 23rd Annual Session of The Indian Ocean Tuna Commission

Who is FPAOI?

The Federation of Artisanal Fishermen of the Indian Ocean (FPAOI) was created in 2015, with the aim of representing and defending the interests of artisanal fishermen in the countries of the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC). FPAOI currently groups together 18 professional organisations and associations representing artisanal fishermen in the Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, La Réunion (France) and the Seychelles. Through the FPAOI, artisanal fishermen in the Indian Ocean work for the recognition of their rights, the importance of their sector in the economies of the region, their contribution to food security and their role in the management of the resources on which they depend.

The FPAOI was established on the basis that artisanal fishers are currently unable to participate fully in decisions making relating to the management and exploitation of the common resources on which they depend, in particular tuna. To remedy this situation, FPAOI wishes to promote the participation of its members in decision-making processes at the national and regional levels. FPAOI is therefore grateful for this opportunity to attend the IOTC plenary session as an observer for the third time.

The importance of artisanal fisheries in the IOC region

The fisheries sector is a pillar of our island economies. A recent report by the Indian Ocean Commission¹ emphasised that the value chain of the fisheries and aquaculture in our countries represent an annual turnover of 1.7 billion Euros, and creating (Direct added value) of 901.7 million Euros. This is equivalent to an annual contribution to the cumulative GDP of IOC countries of around 2.9%.

Artisanal fisheries contribute significantly to this creation of wealth, accounting for about 45% of landings from sea fishing (in terms of volume and value). Almost all of the jobs generated by the fisheries sector in IOC countries - about 130,000 direct and indirect jobs - are attributable to artisanal fisheries. This gives us an idea of the level of fishing dependency of our coastal communities and the importance of this sector to the livelihood and food security of our people.

In the IOTC area, 50% of tuna catches are landed by small-scale fisheries. At the level of the South West Indian Ocean basin and in the IOC area in particular, tuna is a key resource for inshore fishing. In view of the modernization of our small-scale fishing fleets, the proportional importance of tuna in the landings of small-scale fishing in our countries is bound to increase, given the willingness of our countries to limit the fishing effort of demersal resources, and development aspirations of our domestic fishery industries. It is therefore up to our countries, coastal Member States of the IOTC, to manage this shared resource to guarantee the future of our sector.

FPAOI members consider artisanal fisheries of the South West Indian Ocean Islands as an indianocenic cultural heritage that must be protected.

¹ <http://commissionoceanindien.org/fileadmin/projets/smartfish/Rapport/Rapport-COIsocio-eco4.pdf>

On the occasion of the 23rd session of the IOTC, the FPAOI wishes to emphasize 3 points, which it considers important for the management of this resource and to enable the development aspirations of our domestic fishery industries to materialize and to ensure a sustainable and responsible tuna fishery in the Indian Ocean.

1. Management of fishing capacity

The FPAOI noted the concerns about the status of the yellow fin tuna stock in the Indian Ocean, as raised by the IOTC Scientific Committee. Given the importance of tuna to our artisanal fisheries and the food security of the peoples of the South-West Indian Ocean, precautionary measures are needed to reduce fishing effort and ensure the long term sustainability of the stock.

In order to secure the sustainability of stocks, in particular yellow fin tuna and big eye tuna, protection of our environment in particular coral reefs, FPAOI calls for a further reduction of drifting FADs and including the gradual reduction of the number of supply vessels. The relation between instrumented buoys and fads should be clarified. FPAOI is calling for the number of instrumented buoys to be equal to the number of FADs.

FPAOI considers a FAD to be active, in relation to fishing activity and fish behaviour, as soon as it is deployed, consequently calls for non deployment of FADs with non-active buoys.

FPAOI calls for better management of both drifting and anchored FADs as these instruments have an impact on behaviour of fish and also attract mostly juveniles. FPAOI proposes that the number of anchored FADs in use is established to understand the impact on the fishery.

FPAOI stresses, however, that the reduction in fishing capacity will also have to include a ceiling on the number and capacity of purse fishing vessels, and also in particular industrial long liners, in order to manage the current fishing efforts and avoid a transfer of fishing capacity, from one type of fishery to another, which would inevitably lead to excessive fishing capacity and thus a decline in the stock, with an unfavourable impact on the islands of the South West Indian Ocean.

FPAOI calls for the enforcement on the use of drifting gill nets on high seas in line with UN resolution.

2. Allocation of fishing opportunities

FPAOI has carefully monitored the discussions on the limitation of harvests and on the possible distribution of a TAC among IOTC Member States. In this regard, FPAOI took note of the proposal for the establishment of a system for allocating fishing opportunities.

Although FPAOI supports the principle of allocating fishing opportunities by state to allow for consistent management, it is concerned about the principles and criteria that could govern the TAC distribution system. In particular, FPAOI wishes to highlight the potential injustice of an allocation system that would establish a prevalence of the use of historical catches in a manner contrary to the interests and aspirations of coastal states.

Moreover, FPAOI wishes to emphasize the risk of eviction of artisanal fisheries which such a system could exacerbate if its socio-economic importance is not well documented and considered in the allocation of fishing opportunities.

FPAOI supports the proposal, referenced as IOTC–2016–TCAC03, submitted by the G16 Group of Like Minded Coastal States of the Indian Ocean on guiding principles for allocation criteria.

3. Quota / Stock Management

In 2016 under IOTC resolution 16/01 and as amended by resolution 17/01 in 2017, a plan was adopted for the rebuilding of the yellow fin tuna stock in the IOTC area of competence. The purpose of this resolution was due to the fact that the Scientific Committee determined that the yellow fin tuna was being overfished and continued to be an overfishing status. In adopting these resolutions the IOTC members invoked the importance to maintain the tuna stock in perpetuity with high probability, at levels not less than those of producing their maximum sustainable yield.

FPAOI has taken note that in a report, called SFA Fisheries Statistical Report 2016, published by Seychelles Fishing Authority on 14th March 2018, it was stated that on school type, 72% of tuna are caught on FAD associated schools and 28% on free swimming schools. On species type, the report stated that on FAD associated schools, 57% represent skipjack tuna, 35% yellow fin tuna and 7% big eye. The report further stated that on free swimming schools, the catches of yellow fin is very dominant representing 78% of the catch whilst skipjack is 9% and big eye 12%.

Based on the above report and information, FPAOI has noted the catches for 2018 and expresses a serious concerns in respect of the management and sustainability of this fishery. The total catch for 2018 is 431,055 tons and this does not include catches from Industrial long liners. In Resolution 17/01, MSY as estimated for the whole Indian Ocean was 422,000 tons with a range of 406,000 t - 444,000 tons. Using the historical catch data ratios between FADs schools and free swimming schools, it can be estimated that the total catch for FADs should be about 310,359 tons and for free swimming school as 120,695. A further calculation based on the SFA report of species caught, and using historical ratio of the catch between Fads and free swimming school, the total catch for yellow fin tuna for 2018 has been estimated at 108,625 tons for FADs associated schools and 94,142 for free swimming schools thus giving a potential total of 202,768 tons.

These analysis are rough and simple but the magnitude of the possible increase that seems to have taken place raised some serious concerns. The reported catch for yellow fin tuna for 2018 is 137,319 tons against the estimate of 202,768 tons, made above from previous catch ratios. This suggests that there may have been serious misreporting of the catches of yellow fin tuna as another tuna species. Recalling that in resolution 17/01 purse seine catches were to be reduced by 15% from the 2014 level of 126,800 tons, the situation that could exist is a serious cause for concern. FPAOI appeals for all members to better report their catches of yellow fin and for the Scientific Committee of the IOTC to intensely examine the reported species composition to do with the catch of yellow tuna.

Finally FPAOI reaffirms that the fishermen of FPAOI are also dependent on a sustainable tuna fishery for their socio economic development and food security, and appeal to members of IOTC to uphold the commitments made under IOTC resolution 16/01 and 17/01, to maintain the tuna stock in perpetuity, and adhere to the special requirements of the developing States, particularly Small Island developing States relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks (UNFSA), amongst the other commitments made thereof.