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Marine Stewardship Council fisheries assessments

AGAC four oceans Integral Purse Seine Tropical Tuna Fishery- Indian Ocean



Yellowfin Tuna Scope Extension Public Comment Draft Report

Conformity Assessment Body (CAB)	LRQA
Assessment team	Rob Blyth-Skyrme and Carlos Alvarez
Fishery client	AGAC
Assessment type	Scope Extension
Date	May 2025



Assessment Data Sheet

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Glossary

AGAC	Association of Large Tuna Freezers
AIS	Automatic Identification System
AO	Atlantic Ocean
ARAP	Aquatic Resources Authority of Panama
AZTI	Spanish Technical Research Org (Basque)
BET	Bigeye tuna
CAB	(MSC) Conformity Assessment Body
CFP	Common Fisheries Policy (of the EU)
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
CPUE	Catch per Unit Effort
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EMS	Electronic Monitoring System
EPO	Eastern Pacific Ocean
ETP	Endangered, Threatened and Protected (species)
EU	European Union
F	Fishing mortality
FAD	Fish Aggregating Device (the FADs deployed by the AGAC fleet are drifting (d) FADs).
F _{MSY}	Fishing mortality at MSY
FPA	Fishery Partnership Agreement
FSA	Fish Stocks Agreement (see UNFSA)
HCR	Harvest Control Rule
HMS	Highly Migratory Species
IEO	Spanish Institute of Oceanography
IOTC	Indian Ocean Tuna Commission
ISSF	International Seafood Sustainability Foundation
IUU	Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated
LDAC	Long Distance Advisory Council
LRP	Limit Reference Point
MCS	Monitoring, Control and Surveillance
MSE	Management Strategy Evaluation
MSC	Marine Stewardship Council
MSY	Maximum Sustainable Yield
OPAGAC	Organization of Associated Producers of Large Tuna Freezers
PA	Precautionary Approach
PRI	Point of Recruitment Impairment
PSM	Port State Measures
RFMO	Regional Fisheries Management Organisations
ROP	Regional Observer Programme

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SB _{MSY}	Spawning biomass at MSY
SFPA	Sustainable Fishery Partnership Agreement
SGP	Secretaría General de Pesca (Spanish General Secretariat for Fisheries)
SKJ	Skipjack tuna
TAC	Total Allowable Catch
TAE	Total Allowable Effort
TACC	Total Allowable Commercial Catch
TRP	Target Reference Point
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea
UNFSA	United Nations Fish Stock Agreement
UoA	Unit of Assessment
UoC	Unit of Certification
VME	Vulnerable Marine Ecosystem
VMS	Vessel Monitoring System
YFT	Yellowfin tuna

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1. Executive summary

This report comprises the scope extension of the AGAC four oceans Integral Purse Seine Tropical Tuna Fishery (Indian Ocean), to assess Indian Ocean (IO) yellowfin tuna as an additional Principle 1 (P1) species. This scope extension is a reassessment, after it was determined that IO yellowfin tuna did not meet the MSC Standard when the AGAC IO fishery was assessed, initially (Akroyd et al. 2022¹). However, several key concerns raised previously about the status and management of IO yellowfin tuna have been addressed recently, and so the client is seeking its certification through this scope extension assessment.

The scope extension is of IO yellowfin tuna as a P1 species. Skipjack tuna is already certified within the AGAC IO fishery. As such, the scope extension is of IO yellowfin tuna as a P1 species, but in other regards the fishery is the same as when certified in July 2022, and so there is no rescoring of P2 or P3 Performance Indicators.

The Assessment Team for this scope extension was made up of Dr. Rob Blyth-Skyrme (Team Leader, and Principle 2 and Principle 3 Expert) and Dr. Carlos Alvarez (Principle 1 Expert).

This report is the Public Comment Draft Report (PCDR) version of the assessment report. The PCDR provides complete scoring and rationales, based on information collected for the preparation of the initial Announcement Comment Draft Report (ACDR, published on the MSC website on 20th December 2024) and during the site visit (conducted in the week of 27th January 2025). The report also includes the report of a Peer Reviewer selected by the MSC's Peer Review College, and the Assessment Team's response to that review. Finally, it also includes a Client Action Plan, with actions to be undertaken against the conditions that have been set. This PCDR will be provided for registered stakeholder consultation for at least 30 days.

Stakeholders are hereby notified that Section 4.2.4 of the MSC Process v.2.3 states: “*The CAB shall only accept written submissions from stakeholders on the Announcement Comment Draft Report and Public Comment Draft Report if submitted using the ‘[MSC Template for Stakeholder Input into Fishery Assessments](#)’, or if raised at the assessment site visit, either in person or remotely.*”

Stakeholders are also hereby notified that Section 7.20.9.1 of Process v.2.3 states: “*The CAB shall only consider stakeholder input on the Public Comment Draft Report from registered stakeholders*”, where Section 4.2.9 of Process v.2.3 states: “*The CAB shall consider a stakeholder as registered only if they provide written input on the Announcement Comment Draft Report (Section 7.13) or attend the site visit, in person or remotely (Section 7.14).*”

After the Assessment Team has addressed comments received from registered stakeholders and any follow-up from the peer reviewer, the Final Draft Report (FDR) will be published on the MSC website and registered stakeholder input is invited for a further 15 working day period. At that point, if there is no Objection, the CAB's decision to certify or not certify will stand. However, if an Objection is submitted, then a decision to certify or not certify is delayed until the completion of the Disputes Process.

The target eligibility date for the AGAC IO yellowfin tuna UoA is the date of publication of the PCDR (29th May 2025). This is permitted under the MSC FCP v2.3 (Section 7.18.1) and the fishery has appropriate tracking and tracing systems in place to ensure that ‘under-assessment’ fish (i.e., any IO yellowfin tuna) can be segregated from fish that is already certified (i.e., IO skipjack tuna) under the existing AGAC IO fishery certificate (Akroyd et al. 2022).

Strengths: Principle 1: IO yellowfin tuna

- According to trends in B and F relative to MSY reference points, as estimated by the stock assessment, the stock has always been around or above B_{MSY} with F always around or below F_{MSY} .

¹<https://cert.msc.org/FileLoader/FileLinkDownload.aspx/GetFile?encryptedKey=smivcVk6EH0IkDaY7Rr+TffY0H704BWGjUeSgo9Fj0EJM1/rx1luwCtAW2gSmlj/>

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- Sufficient information is available on stock abundance, stock structure, stock productivity, fleet composition and UoA removals as well as environmental information.
- A new assessment was undertaken in 2024 that uses data such as age and growth, mortality and fecundity and hence is adapted to the major features of yellowfin tuna biology.

Weaknesses: Principle 1: IO yellowfin tuna

- At present, there is a generally-understood HCR in place but not a well-defined HCR.
- The HCR is not considered robust to uncertainties.
- The proportion of the catch of tropical tunas taken in artisanal fleets operating in the Indian Ocean is substantial. Although efforts to properly quantify catches in these fleets has resulted in a step-change improvement in data quality in recent years, there is still some way to go before these data can be considered comprehensive.

Conditions & Recommendations

When the AGAC IO fishery was certified in July 2022, eight binding conditions were set, of which only Conditions 1 and 2 were set on Principle 1 (for the certified skipjack tuna UoA). Conditions 3-8 were set on Principles 2 and 3 and were binding for skipjack tuna (UoA 6), but non-binding for bigeye tuna (UoA 5) and yellowfin tuna (UoA 4) because these were not certified. Non-binding conditions were also set on Principle 1 for yellowfin tuna (#1-2) and on Principle 2 for yellowfin tuna relating to skipjack tuna as a main primary species (#4). As a result of the rescoring undertaken through the yellowfin tuna scope extension, the existing non-binding conditions on P1 for yellowfin tuna will be closed, and any PI score of 60-79 would result in new conditions being set. However, non-binding condition #4 is now reinstated as binding Condition 10.

For interested readers, the report provides background to the target species and fishery covered by the assessment, information on the wider impacts of the fishery and the management regime, supported by full details of the assessment team, a full list of references used, and details of the stakeholder consultation process.

Determination

At the PCDR stage, the Assessment Team determines that UoA 4 (yellowfin tuna) of the AGAC IO Fishery meets the MSC Requirements. This determination will be presented to LRQA’s decision making entity that this fishery has passed its assessment and should be certified.

LRQA confirms that this fishery is within scope. AGAC is currently the certificate holder and have issued a certificate sharing agreement covering other eligible fishers. This agreement was included in the original fishery announcement.

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2. Report details

2.1. Authorship and peer review details

The team members listed below (Table 1) have completed all requisite training and signed all relevant forms for assessment team membership on this fishery. A short biography is provided for each team member in Section 8.9. Peer Reviewers are listed in Table 2.

Table 1: Authorship and assessment team

Role	Name	Area of expertise
Team leader	Rob Blyth-Skyrme	Principle 2 and Principle 3
Team members	Carlos Avarez	Principle 1

The Peer Reviewers listed in Table 2 were proposed by the MSC’s Peer Review College to undertake a peer review of the assessment report. As a scope extension, only one review was undertaken.

Table 2: Proposed peer reviewers (only one is selected by the Peer Review College to undertake the review).

Peer reviewers	<p><u>Dr Geoff Tingley</u></p> <p>Dr Geoff Tingley has over 30 years experience in academia, government and the private sector, mostly working in marine & freshwater fisheries research and applied fisheries management. His long-term focus has been on improving the sustainability of fisheries world-wide, using tools such as the MSC certification scheme and fishery improvement projects (FIPs) with Sustainable Fisheries Partnership (SFP). Dr Tingley has been a Principal Scientist at both Cefas in the UK, and then at New Zealand’s Ministry of Primary Industries, where he provided advice on the science & management of deepwater and inshore fisheries both within the EEZ and for the NZ high seas fisheries in the Pacific. This included abundance estimation and stock assessments of hoki, orange roughy, ling, hake, sharks, squid & rock lobster, as well as understanding and mitigating the environmental impacts of fishing. He chaired a Deepwater Fisheries Assessment Working Group and provided advice on fisheries science & management both within the Ministry and to industry. Dr Tingley has also advised on MSC certification, including stock status (P1), ecosystem elements of by-catch, benthic, ecosystem and ETP impacts (P2) and fisheries management (P3) (including hake, ling, orange roughy, oreo, squid). He was also Head of the NZ Delegation to the Scientific Committee of the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation (SPRFMO) and a NZ Delegate to the SPRFMO Commission. He also initiated and then chaired the MPI South Pacific Fisheries Assessment Working Group to support the science process underpinning the work for SPRFMO.</p>
	<p><u>Dr Joe Powers</u></p> <p>Dr Joe Powers has been involved in fisheries issues for more than 40 years, conducting stock assessments, coordinating international stock assessment research, communicating scientific advice to fishery management councils and commissions and also serving as the senior marine fisheries manager in the southeast US. His background includes: Professor of Marine Resource Assessment at Louisiana State University; Senior Stock Assessment Scientist of the US’s National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) southeast region,</p>

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	Laboratory Director of a NMFS facility; lead US scientist for Atlantic tuna, swordfish and billfish species for the International Commission for the conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT); Chair of the Scientific Committee of ICCAT; Chair of the Stock Assessment Committee for Southern Bluefin Tuna; Chair of the Scientific Committee of the Gulf of Mexico Fisheries Management Council. He has also worked on numerous Marine Stewardship Council assessments of tunas, swordfish, hake and other fisheries resources in the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans.
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2.2. Version details

The following versions of the Fisheries Programme Documents were used in the assessment of the AGAC IO yellowfin tuna UoA (Table 3).

Table 3: Fisheries program documents versions

Document/Assessment Tree	Version number/Type
MSC Fisheries Certification Process	Version 2.3
MSC Fisheries Standard	Version 2.01
Assessment tree	Default
MSC General Certification Requirements	Version 2.7
MSC Reporting Template	Version 1.2

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3. Unit of Assessment and Unit of Certification

3.1. Unit of Assessment

This report comprises a Scope Extension of the certified AGAC Four Oceans Integral Purse Seine Tropical Tuna Fishery (IO), to assess yellowfin tuna (YFT) as an additional P1 species. The Unit of Assessment (UoA) that is being assessed within the Scope Extension is described below in Table 4. It is noted that this is a reassessment of the same UoA (i.e., ‘yellowfin tuna’ – UoA 4) that was deemed not to meet the MSC Standard in the original assessment of the AGAC IO fishery, completed in July 2022 (Akroyd et al 2022²), although since certification the EEZs of Kenya³, Mauritius and Tanzania⁴ have been added to the UoA through gap analyses. There are no other changes in scope for the AGAC IO Fishery.

Table 4: Unit of Assessment (UoA)

UoA 4	Description
Species	Yellowfin tuna (<i>Thunnus albacares</i>)
Stock	Indian Ocean
Geographical area	Indian Ocean – FAO areas 51 and 57 (including EEZs of Seychelles, Madagascar, Mauritius, Comoros, TAAF, Tanzania, Kenya and EU-Mayotte)
Fishing gear type and, if relevant, vessel type	Purse Seine (FAD and FSC)
Client group	AGAC
Other eligible fishers	<p>All vessels belonging to AGAC and certified under the UNE 195006 Standard “Atún de Pesca Responsable (APR)” are eligible to be covered by the MSC certificate. However, adherence to said certificate as an eligible fisherman shall be subject to compliance with the policy, terms and conditions of AGAC and will be certified under UNE 196005 APR Standard.</p> <p>Among the conditions are the requirements specified in the Unit of Certification defined in the assessment and their methods and catches must comply with these requirements.</p> <p>In the event of other eligible fishers to access the certificate, the current members will enter into negotiations on access taking into account the above and based on equitable sharing cost as determined by the AGAC members.</p>

3.2. Unit of Certification

It is anticipated that the IO yellowfin tuna UoC would be the same as the draft UoA (Table 4). This will be confirmed at the completion of the assessment as appropriate.

²<https://cert.msc.org/FileLoader/FileLinkDownload.aspx/GetFile?encryptedKey=smivcVk6EHOIkDaY7Rr+TFfy0H704BWGjUeSgo9Fj0EJM1/rx1luwCtAW2gSmlI/>

³<https://cert.msc.org/FileLoader/FileLinkDownload.aspx/GetFile?encryptedKey=FP9XdGTxgZlIjId0LzBpMIN9k9mLqEhAMLKcJrMtPqpvcc02RBWcASZKye5HbwqQ>

⁴<https://cert.msc.org/FileLoader/FileLinkDownload.aspx/GetFile?encryptedKey=DeoV3UluTmE6mBHFwftXG18GvPBOGv5SF0rv8JWYk4bo+AEIDQLKyiyntKep5K5>

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Table 5: Unit of Certification (UoC)

UoA 4	Description
Species	Yellowfin tuna (<i>Thunnus albacares</i>)
Stock	Indian Ocean
Geographical area	Indian Ocean – FAO areas 51 and 57 (including EEZs of Seychelles, Madagascar, Mauritius, Comoros, TAAF, Tanzania, Kenya and EU-Mayotte)
Fishing gear type and, if relevant, vessel type	Purse Seine (FAD and FSC)
Client group	AGAC
Other eligible fishers	<p>All vessels belonging to AGAC and certified under the UNE 195006 Standard “Atún de Pesca Responsable (APR)” are eligible to be covered by the MSC certificate. However, adherence to said certificate as an eligible fisherman shall be subject to compliance with the policy, terms and conditions of AGAC and will be certified under UNE 196005 APR Standard.</p> <p>Among the conditions are the requirements specified in the Unit of Certification defined in the assessment and their methods and catches must comply with these requirements.</p> <p>In the event of other eligible fishers to access the certificate, the current members will enter into negotiations on access taking into account the above and based on equitable sharing cost as determined by the AGAC members.</p>

3.3. Gap analysis

Under 7.27.5.b (MSC 2022), as part of the Scope Extension process, a gap analysis is required to be undertaken to confirm which assessment components and scoring elements are the same between the proposed UoA 4 (AGAC IO yellowfin tuna) and the existing UoC (AGAC IO skipjack tuna); this is completed, below (Table 6).

Table 6: Gap analysis table for AGAC IO yellowfin tuna scope extension assessment components

Component	Existing certified UoAs – AGAC IO skipjack tuna (Akroyd et al. 2022)	Scope extension – AGAC IO yellowfin tuna
Principle 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outcome Harvest strategy (Management) 	Yellowfin tuna was assessed as UoA 4 in the original AGAC IO assessment, at which time it did not meet the MSC Standard. This scope extension is a new assessment, and all P1 PIs will be rescored.
Principle 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primary species Secondary species ETP species Habitats Ecosystem 	Yellowfin tuna is targeted with skipjack tuna in the AGAC IO Fishery. Skipjack tuna (UoA 6) was certified in the original assessment (Akroyd et al. 2022) but yellowfin tuna was not. There will be no difference in the way the fishery operates or in impacts on P2 components if yellowfin tuna is also certified; P2 is therefore not rescored.
Principle 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Governance and policy Fishery-specific management system 	P3 is the same as the existing certified skipjack tuna UoC, so P3 for yellowfin tuna is also not rescored.

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3.4. Confirmation of scope

With regard to the MSC scope requirements, as set out in 7.4.8 of MSC Process v.2.3, LRQA confirms that the AGAC IO Fishery, including yellowfin tuna as assessed through this scope extension, is within scope.

7.4.8.1: The UoA does not target amphibians, reptiles, birds or mammals.

7.4.8.2: The UoA does not use poisons or explosives.

7.4.8.3: The UoA is not conducted under a controversial unilateral exemption to an international agreement.

7.4.8.4: AGAC has confirmed its adherence to the MSC's labour policy.

7.4.8.5: AGAC does not include an entity that has been convicted for a shark finning violation in the last two years.

7.4.8.6: The UOA has a mechanism for resolving disputes through national laws of the AGAC fleets and IOTC processes, and disputes do not overwhelm the UoA.

7.4.8.7: The UoA meets the MSC's enhanced fisheries criteria (see Section 3.4.1, below).

7.4.8.8: Yellowfin tuna is not an introduced species to the Indian Ocean.

3.4.1. Scope of assessment in relation to enhanced or introduced fisheries

When the AGAC IO fishery was certified originally, the following text regarding its assessment as an enhanced fishery was included, now adapted to account for the application of MSC Fisheries Certification Process v.2.3.

MSC FCP v2.3 Guidance (G)7.4.8.7 outlines scope criteria for enhanced fisheries. 'Scope Criterion C: Habitat and Ecosystem Impact' states:

*"Habitat modifications in enhanced fisheries can include both physical changes to the sea bed or river course and the use of a range of man-made structures associated with the rearing or capture of fish that are not strictly 'fishing gear'. In the first case, modifications can range from the construction of simple ponds in intertidal areas or river floodplains through to watercourse management measures aimed at improving spawning habitats. **Examples of the second case are fish attracting and/or aggregating devices (e.g., FADs), lobster casitas and mussel culture ropes (in CAG systems). Such artificial habitat modifications either enhance the productivity of the fishery or facilitate the capture or production of commercial marine species"**.*

LRQA confirms that the AGAC IO fishery under assessment is eligible for assessment as an enhanced fishery because, in the context that FADs are temporary structures, the scope criteria for habitat modifications is met in full (FCP v.2.3, 7.4.8.7, Table 1, Section C: "Any modifications to the habitat of the stock are reversible and do not cause serious or irreversible harm to the natural ecosystem's structure and function.").

In addition to fulfilling MSC FCP 7.4.8.7 requirements above and because the fishery under assessment is neither an Enhanced Bivalve nor Salmon fishery, MSC requirements FCP v2.3. 7.7.1.1 and 7.7.1.2 apply. The audit team have reviewed the requirements and confirm that no modifications to the default assessment tree are needed. LR note this is in line with other MSC certified tuna fisheries which have scored FADs against the default assessment tree.

If the fishery is enhanced but does not follow MSC Standard Annex SB or Annex SC the CAB shall provide assessment of the MSC FCP v2.1 7.7.1.2.

"7.7.1.2 The CAB shall assess:

a. Enhancement activities against the impacts on the natural reproductive component of the associated wild stock.

b. The extent of translocation against:

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i. The effect on the natural genetic characteristics of the stock.

ii. The environmental impacts of translocation.

c. Environmental modification activities under the Principle 2 assessment for their impacts on other species or the wild environment. The CAB shall consider environmental impacts, including:

i. Feed augmentation.

ii. The use of medicines or other chemical compounds.

iii. Fertilisation to enhance natural food availability.

iv. Removal of predators or competitors.

d. The impacts of habitat modification under the habitats and ecosystems components in Principle 2. The CAB shall consider environmental impacts including:

i. Whether serious or irreversible harm may be caused to the natural ecosystem's structure and function, including the natural food chains of predator and/or prey species.

ii. The types and extent of habitat modifications and the possibility of these causing serious or irreversible harm."

Audit team's response to MSC FCP 7.7.1.2 requirements:

7.7.1.2 a. FADs are used to attract the target species but all removals of each target stock is known irrespective of the use of FADs and therefore the impact is assessed under the default assessment tree Principle 1.

7.7.1.2.b. This criterion is not applicable to the fishery under assessment here. Tunas are highly migratory species that are native to and range freely within the region that is fished; there is no translocation in this fishery.

7.7.1.2.c. i-iii are not applicable to the fishery under assessment here. iv, is assessed under multiple Principle 2 PIs as part of the default assessment tree.

7.7.1.2.d. both i and ii are assessed under multiple Principle 2 PIs as part of the default assessment tree.

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4. Overview of the fishery

4.1. The Indian Ocean (AO) tuna fishery

The catch of tropical tunas in the Indian Ocean has been taken by different methods, with the balance of gear types changing considerably over time. Improvements in technology and the intensity of pirate activity have been important factors in the diversity of fishing methods and effort distribution. Presently, purse seine fishing accounts for about 40-45% of the catch (Figure 1). It is also worth noting that in the last 30 years, the catch from the artisanal fisheries has fluctuated between 30 to 55% of the total catch (Figure 2).

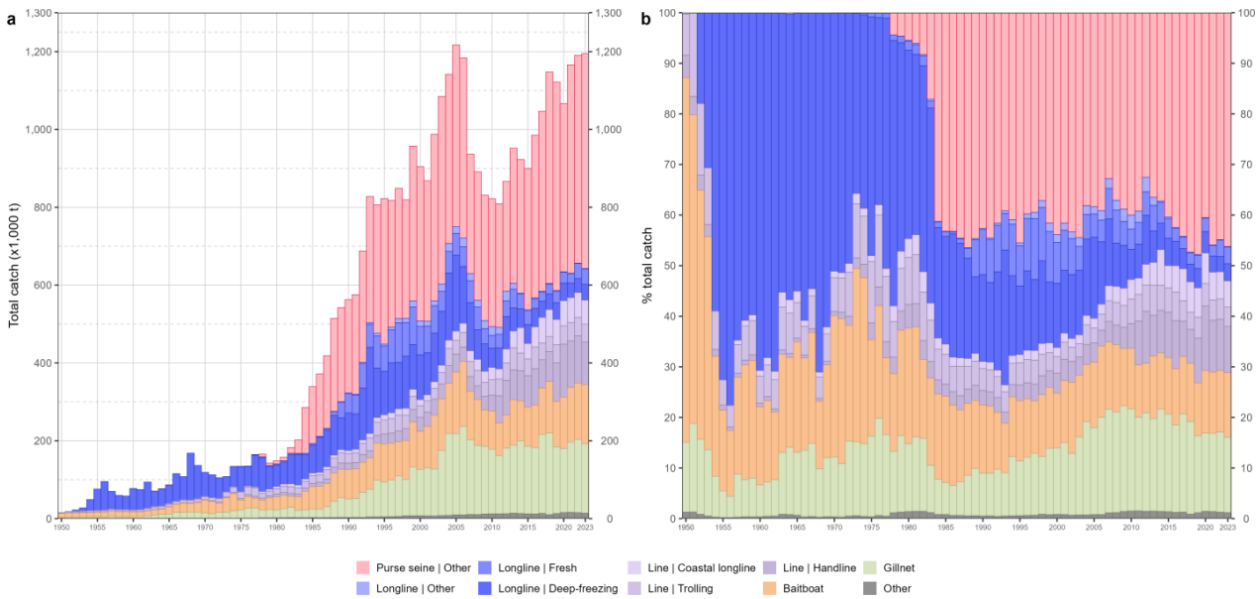


Figure 1. Catch of tropical tunas in the Indian Ocean by type of fishery (from IOTC 2024a).

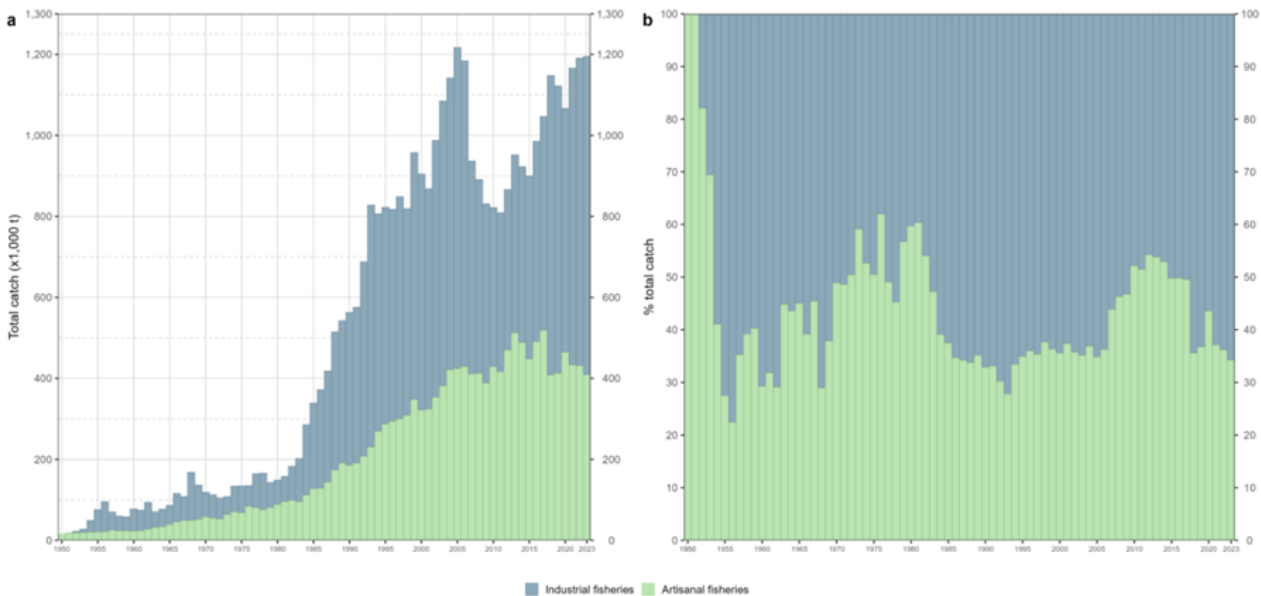


Figure 2. Annual catch of tropical tunas in the Indian Ocean showing catches from artisanal and industrial fleets (from IOTC 2024a).

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Figure 3 shows the catch of all tropical tunas in the Indian Ocean. Catches were low for the first 30 years of the series but with the arrival of the purse seine fleet in the mid-1980s and increasing artisanal effort, catches increased steeply until 2005. Catches in the artisanal fleet have remained fairly consistent since that time, but there was a marked decline in the industrial fleets that continued until about 2012 (Figure 2, left panel). From that point, total catches then increased again as the industrial catches recovered steadily back towards earlier levels. Estimated annual total catches of the three tropical tuna species in the Indian Ocean for the 10-year period 2014 to 2023 are shown in Table 7.

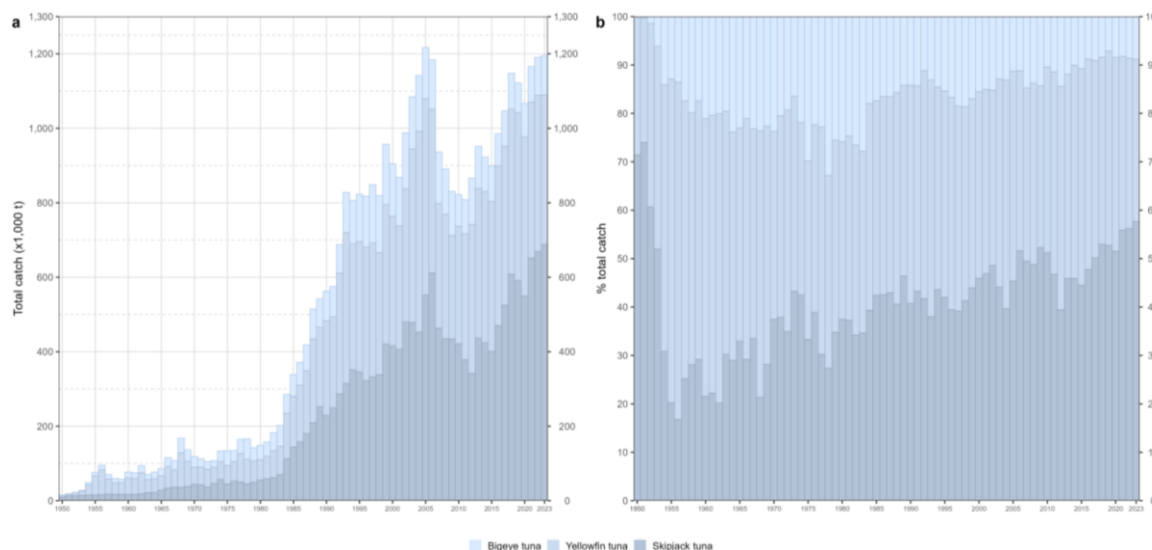


Figure 3. History of absolute and cumulative retained catch of tropical tunas in the Indian Ocean (from IOTC 2024a).

Table 7: Annual IO catches (t) of yellowfin, skipjack, and bigeye tunas, by all gear types (i.e., including longline) combined for 2014-2023 (Source: [IOTC database](#)).

	YFT	SKJ	BET		YFT	SKJ	BET
2014	405,805	423,932	93,026	2019	450,586	591,468	79,898
2015	402,852	400,392	96,421	2020	426,944	549,588	90,068
2016	428,478	470,006	86,874	2021	418,587	651,600	95,793
2017	426,966	524,887	94,995	2022	419,110	669,266	102,324
2018	443,252	608,126	96,338	2023	400,951	688,680	105,369
				Mean	422,353	557,795	94,111

Figure 4 presents the annual catch of yellowfin tuna in the Indian Ocean by main gear groups. The yellowfin catch went from around 28,000 t in the 1950s to over 400,000 t in 2011. The catch has been relatively stable at a little over 400,000 t since that time. The catch is dominated by purse seiners setting on floating objects and handline fishers, followed gillnetters and purse seiners setting on free schools of fish.

From the early 2010s, purse seine has been the dominant fishing method harvesting 33% of the total IO yellowfin tuna catch (by weight), with the longline, handline, gillnet fisheries, comprising 14%, 19% and 14% of the catch, respectively. A smaller component of the catch was taken by the regionally important baitboat (5%) and troll (5%) fisheries. The recent increase in the total catch has been attributable to an increase in catch from all the major fisheries. The contribution of yellowfin to the total catch of tropical tunas in the Indian Ocean has been approximately 40% since the 1980s. The purse seine catch is generally distributed equally between free-school and associated (log and FAD sets) schools, although the large catches in 2003–2005 were dominated by fishing on free-schools. Conversely, from 2013 the purse-seine catch has been dominated (65%) by the associated fishery. Purse seiners and gillnetters catch a wide size range of yellowfin tuna, whereas the longline fishery takes mostly adult fish.

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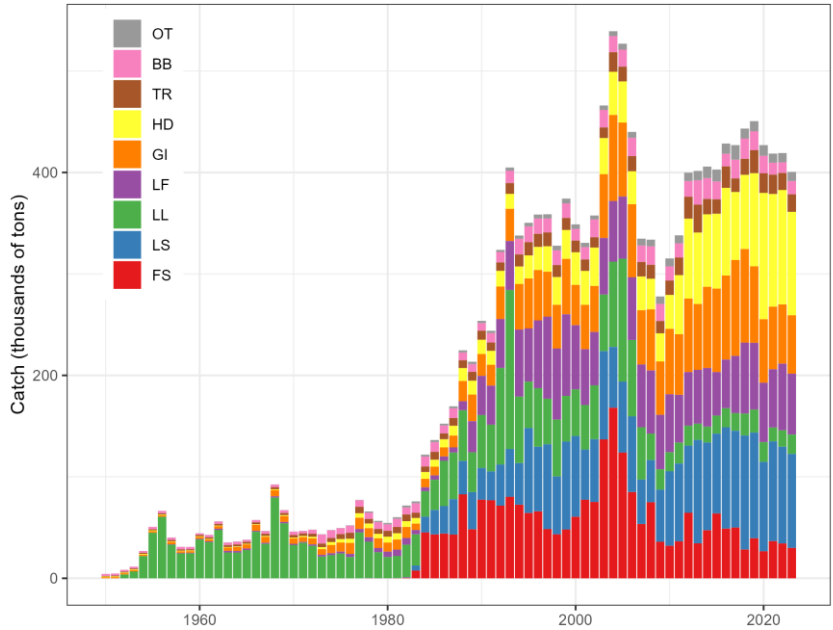


Figure 4. Total catch history of yellowfin tuna in the Indian Ocean by type of fishery (from Urtizbera et al. 2024).

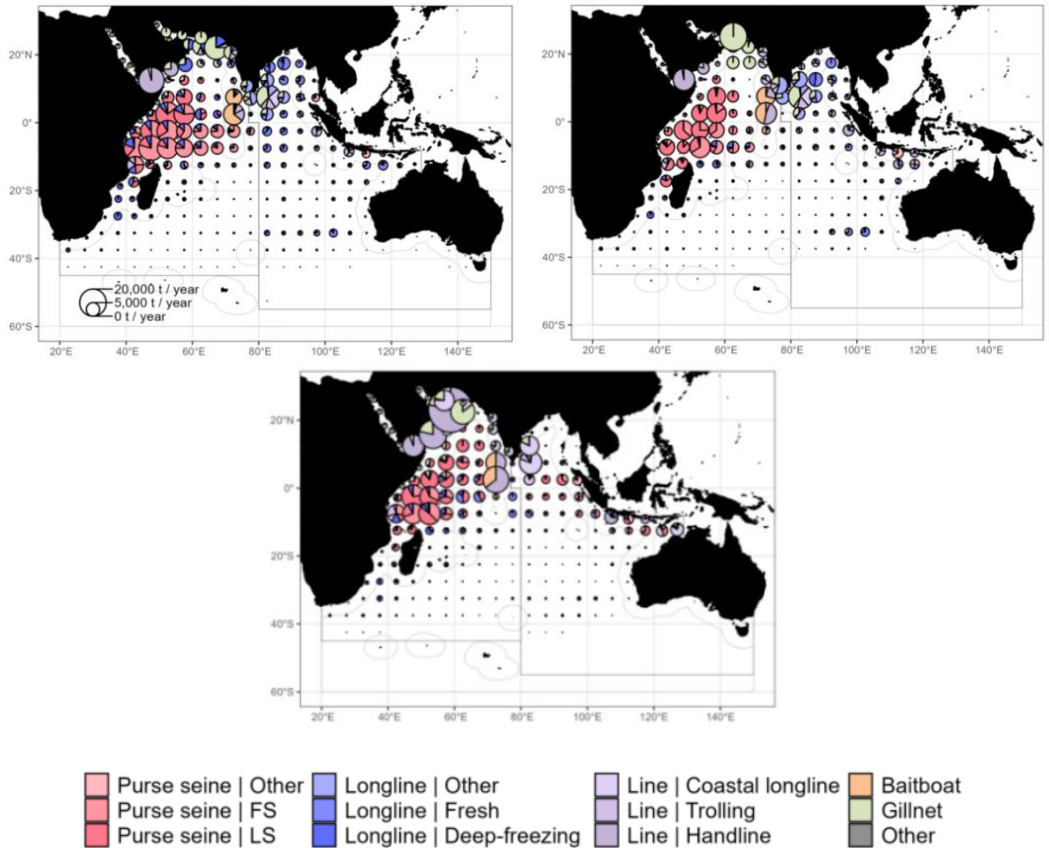


Figure 5. Distribution of the estimated mean catch of yellowfin tuna in the Indian Ocean in the decades 2000-2009 (upper left), 2010-2019 (upper right) and in 2023 (below) (from IOTC 2024a).

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The type of method and gear to catch yellowfin tuna closely relates to the geographic distribution of effort, from small-scale artisanal fisheries (in the Arabian Sea, Mozambique Channel and waters around Indonesia, Sri Lanka and the Maldives and Lakshadweep Islands) to large gillnetters (from Oman, Iran and Pakistan operating mostly but not exclusively in the Arabian Sea) and distant-water longliners and purse seiners that operate widely in equatorial and tropical waters (Figure 5).

Historically, most of the yellowfin catch is taken from the western equatorial region of the IO (47%) and, to a lesser extent, the Arabian Sea (21%), the eastern equatorial region (25%) and the Mozambique Channel (8%). The purse-seine and baitboat fisheries operate almost exclusively within the western equatorial region, while catches from the Arabian Sea are principally by handline, gillnet, and longline. Catches from the eastern equatorial region were dominated by longline and gillnet (around Sri Lanka and Indonesia). The southern Indian Ocean accounts for a small proportion of the total yellowfin catch (1%) taken exclusively by longline.

From 2008–2012 due to the threat of piracy, the bulk of the industrial purse seine and longline fleets moved from the western waters to avoid the coastal and off-shore waters off Somalia, Kenya and Tanzania. The threat of piracy was particularly affecting the freezer longline fleet and levels of effort and catch decreased markedly from 2007. The total catch by freezing longliners declined to about 2,000 t in 2010, a 10-fold decrease in catch from the years before the onset of piracy. Purse seine catches also dropped in 2008– 2010 but subsequently recovered to the earlier level as measures were adopted to manage piracy risk, although the risk of piracy has not gone away entirely in recent years.

4.1. The AGAC client fishery

AGAC represents the interests of eight shipowner groups owning 48 industrial tuna purse seiners, operating in tropical and subtropical seas, worldwide. The fleet targets the tropical tuna species – yellowfin tuna (YFT), bigeye tuna (BET) and skipjack tuna (SKJ), often employing fish aggregating devices (FADs) in the fishing process.

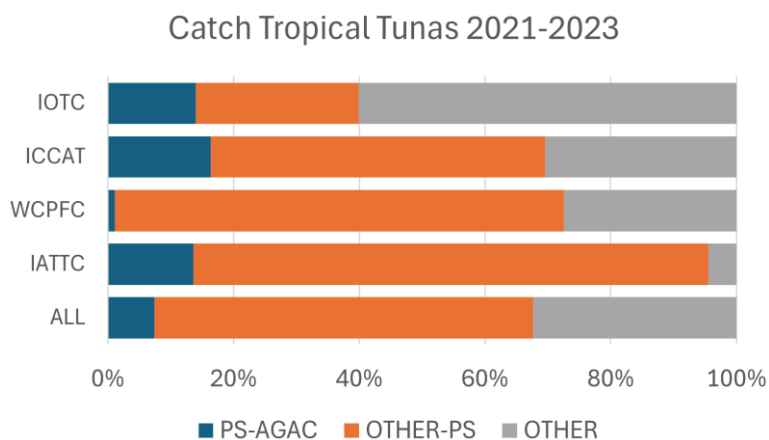


Figure 6: Catches (%) of tropical tunas by AGAC purse seiners (blue), other purse seiners (orange) and other fleets (grey), by RFMO area of competence; mean value over the period 2021-2023 (Source: AGAC).

Catches of the AGAC fleet in recent years have been around 365,000 metric tons of tropical tuna species, worldwide. This represents 7% of the total catches of tropical tunas, across all fishing fleets, gear types, and oceans. The contribution of catches to the total catches of tropical tunas varies depending on the ocean, ranging from around 17% of the total in the Atlantic Ocean to 1% in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean. The AGAC fleet catches around 14% of the IO total (Figure 6).

Catches of yellowfin tuna in the Indian Ocean by the AGAC UoA is detailed in Table 8, and the number of sets undertaken by the fleet are detailed in Table 9.

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Table 8: AGAC IO Logbook Catch – yellowfin tuna (t), for 2020-2023 (source: AGAC).

Stock	2020	2021	2022	2023
Yellowfin tuna	38,564	37,814	40,724	40,608

Table 9: AGAC IO Logbook number of sets for 2020-2023 (source: AGAC).

	2020	2021	2022	2023
Sets	4,089	3,807	3,371	4,070

The AGAC fishery is focused in the western Indian Ocean, with the majority of the catch taken from international waters and the Madagascar and Seychelles EEZs (Figure 7).

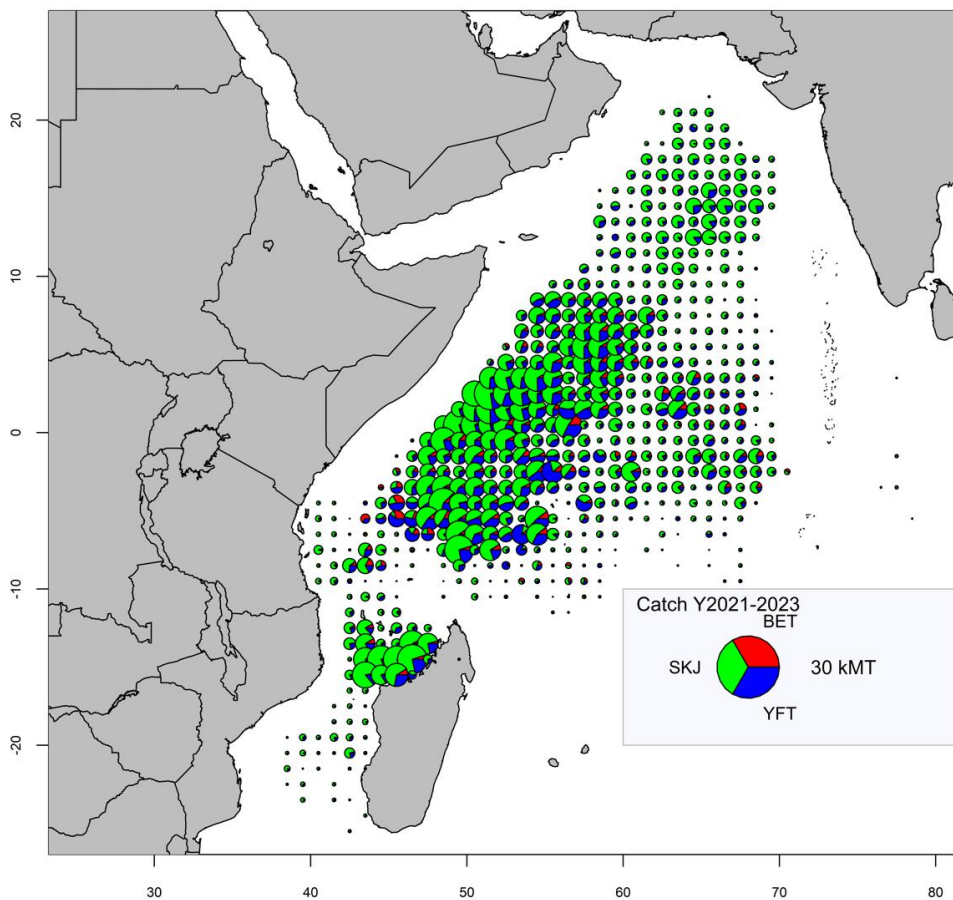


Figure 7: Map showing the distribution of AGAC sets and catches of different tropical tuna species in the IO for 2021-2023.

The AGAC fleet fishes with purse seine gear, which consists of a large vertical net that is deployed to surround a school of fish. The purse seine has floats along the top line and chains or weights at its bottom to allow the net to sink. Once the fish school is encircled, the net is closed underneath the school by hauling the purse line at the bottom of the net, which is called “pursing”. As the volume of the net becomes smaller, the fish become more concentrated and the catch

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can then be scooped out using a small net, called a brailer. Purse seine vessels fish either by spotting free-swimming schools of tuna (unassociated or ‘free-school’ sets) or by utilising floating objects that attract fish (‘associated’ sets), using either natural or man-made objects or fish aggregating devices (FADs). Sets around natural objects are generally referred to as ‘log sets’. Man-made FADs are designed to attract and aggregate fish around them and are either anchored to the seabed or left to drift in the prevailing currents. AGAC vessels do not use anchored FADs. Historically, FADs were made from waste materials (e.g., old rope and netting) with some natural components (e.g., palm fronds and bamboo poles). There are concerns about the use of waste materials, including because of the risk posed by old netting to species that may become entangled, and because the loss of FADs can contribute to marine pollution, but the global purse seine fleet is increasingly pursuing more sustainable and less impacting options. The AGAC fleet is at the forefront of these efforts, including through a commitment to using only completely non-entangling FADs (i.e., with no netting) from January 1st 2024 in all oceans, although this is now the requirement in the IOTC region.

Searching for the fish schools and assessing their size and direction of movement is an important part of purse seine fishing operations. Sophisticated electronics, such as echo sounders, sonar, and track plotters, may be used to search for and track schools, assessing their size and movement and keeping in touch with the school while it is surrounded with the seine net. Fish spotters are positioned in the crow’s nest, built high up on the mast of the vessels for further visual support. Large vessels can have observation towers and helicopter landing decks. In some oceans, helicopters and spotter planes may be used for detecting fish schools, but this practice is not permitted in the Indian Ocean. Vessels are also equipped with a skiff which is used to help pull the net around when encircling the school (Figure 8). A detailed description of tuna purse seine fishing operations is provided by the FAO (<http://www.fao.org/fishery/fishtech/40/en>).

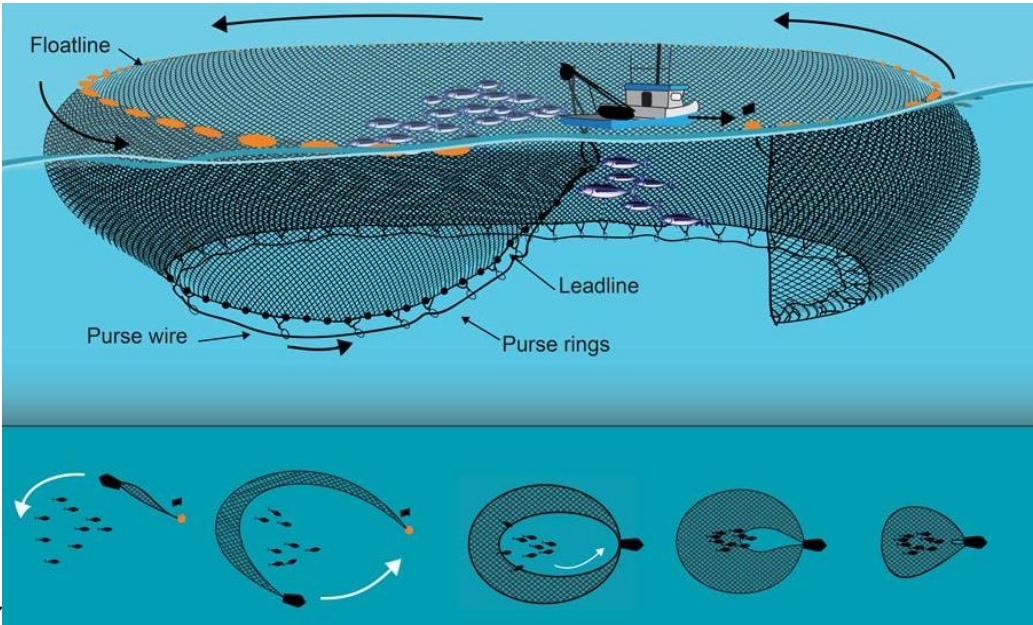


Figure 7

Figure 8: Illustration of a tuna purse seine set (Source: <http://www.afma.gov.au/portfolio-item/purse-seine/>).

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5. Assessment results overview

5.1. Determination

The Assessment Team has considered the suggested changes and comments made by stakeholders, the client and a peer reviewer, and at the PCDR stage the AGAC IO yellowfin tuna fishery (UoA 4) is determined to meet the MSC Requirements, such that the UoA should be certified.

At the PCDR stage, this is not a final decision, and the CAB has not confirmed the determination.

5.2. Principle level scores

The overall Principle level scores for UoA 5 (IO BET) and UoA 6 (IO SKJ) are presented in Table 10, below. At the time of the PCDR for the IO YFT (UoA 4), the scores for P2 and P3 are as derived during the latest, Year 2 audit of the AGAC IO Fishery (Blyth-Skyrme et al. 2025⁵), completed in January 2025, but the P1 score is provisional, only. This will be updated through the course of this scope extension assessment.

It is noted that IO bigeye tuna (UoA 5) did not meet the MSC Standard required score of 80 for Principle 1, and so bigeye tuna in the IO is not MSC certified (but is currently in the In-Transition to MSC [ITM] programme⁶).

Table 10: Principle level scores

Principle	UoA 4 (IO YFT – this Scope Extension)	UoA 5 (IO BET – not certified)	UoA 6 (IO SKJ – certified)
Principle 1: Target species	84.2	<80 (UoA not certified)	85.8 (UoA certified 2022)
Principle 2: Ecosystem impacts	82.3	82.7	82.7
Principle 3: Management system	85.2	85.2	85.2

5.3. Summary of Performance Indicator level scores

The following table (Table 11) provides the detailed scores at the Performance Indicator level for the AGAC IO YFT UoA. At the PCDR stage the scores for Principle 1 are still provisional and may change as a result of comments received during public consultation, although they have been agreed during an annual harmonisation process (See Section **Error! Reference source not found.**). P1 scores will be updated at each stage of the assessment process as needed. Scoring for P2 and P3 is not being considered for this scope extension, and are as derived during the latest, Year 2 audit (Blyth-Skyrme et al. 2025).

⁵<https://cert.msc.org/FileLoader/FileLinkDownload.aspx/GetFile?encryptedKey=ITf4dr+sTariboXtRRJbU6MJxWmLV6odKmWHcgY+4sDCWtelCYtnyCxnO2H/SqGv>

⁶<https://cert.msc.org/FileLoader/FileLinkDownload.aspx/GetFile?encryptedKey=gUkeGjAiAa0KhpPnjorUff5goTbhZtkra0SwjXNt7oYBFvYTGG7fQtarbN2wU2WU>

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Table 11: Performance Indicator level scores – UoA 4

Principle	Component	Performance Indicator (PI)		Score UoA 4 – IO YFT
1	Outcome	1.1.1	Stock status	90
		1.1.2	Stock rebuilding	N/A
	Management	1.2.1	Harvest strategy	95
		1.2.2	Harvest control rules & tools	60
		1.2.3	Information & monitoring	80
		1.2.4	Assessment of stock status	90
2	Primary species	2.1.1	Outcome	95
		2.1.2	Management	75
		2.1.3	Information	95
	Secondary species	2.2.1	Outcome	80
		2.2.2	Management	85
		2.2.3	Information	90
	ETP species	2.3.1	Outcome	80
		2.3.2	Management	90
		2.3.3	Information	75
	Habitats	2.4.1	Outcome	85
		2.4.2	Management	80
		2.4.3	Information	75
	Ecosystem	2.5.1	Outcome	80
		2.5.2	Management	80
		2.5.3	Information	75
3	Governance and policy	3.1.1	Legal & customary framework	80
		3.1.2	Consultation, roles & responsibilities	95
		3.1.3	Long term objectives	100
	Fishery specific management system	3.2.1	Fishery specific objectives	85
		3.2.2	Decision making processes	75
		3.2.3	Compliance & enforcement	75
		3.2.4	Monitoring & management performance evaluation	80

Scores are the same as presented in the Yr 2 audit of the AGAC IO Fishery (Blyth-Skyrme et al. 2025).

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5.4. Summary of conditions

At the PCDR stage, new condition (#9) is raised in this scope extension assessment of the AGAC IO YFT (UoA 4) against PI 1.2.2.

It is noted that certifying the IO YFT UoA requires that any non-binding conditions that were identified at the original assessment and where performance has not been raised to \geq SG80 in the intervening period are made binding. As a result, a further new condition (#10) is raised for UoA 4 against PI 2.1.2 Slc, derived from the non-binding condition #4 that was identified in the original assessment of the fishery (Akroyd et al. 2022). Full details of these conditions is provided in Section 8.5.3.

Table 12: Summary of the new condition set against UoA 4 (IO YFT) of the AGAC IO Fishery.

Condition number	Condition	PI	Deadline	Exceptional circumstances?	Carried over from previous certificate ?	Related to previous condition ?
9	<p>By Year 2 of a new certificate for the AGAC IO Fishery (2029), provide evidence that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sla: Well defined HCRs are in place that ensure that the exploitation rate is reduced as the PRI is approached, are expected to keep the stock fluctuating around a target level consistent with (or above) MSY. • Slb: The HCRs are likely to be robust to the main uncertainties. • Slc: Available evidence indicates that the tools in use are appropriate and effective in achieving the exploitation levels required under the HCRs 	1.2.2 Sla, Slb and Slc	Year 2 audit of a new certificate (2029)	No	No	No
10 (modified from non-binding Condition 4 – Akroyd et al. 2022)	By Year 4 of the current certificate of the AGAC IO Fishery (2026), demonstrate there is some evidence that the measures/partial strategy (for SKJ) is being implemented successfully.	2.1.2 Slc	Year 4	No	No	No

5.4.1. Recommendations (optional)

There are no recommendations raised for the AGAC IO YFT UoA.

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6. Traceability and eligibility

6.1. Eligibility date

The eligibility date for the AGAC IO yellowfin tuna UoA is the date of publication of the PCDR (29th May 2025). This is permitted under the MSC FCP v2.3 (Section 7.18.1) and the fishery has appropriate tracking and tracing systems in place to ensure that 'under-assessment' fish (i.e., any IO yellowfin tuna) can be segregated from fish that is already certified (i.e., IO skipjack tuna) under the existing AGAC AO fishery certificate (Akroyd et al. 2022).

6.2. Traceability within the fishery

AGAC represents 48 freezer tuna vessels with Spanish and foreign flags operating in the waters of the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans. The companies that are grouped in AGAC have led several initiatives with the aim of achieving responsible fishing by implementing social standards and good practices on board their vessels, minimizing the impact of fishing activity on the ecosystem, and promoting the sustainability of tuna stocks that they depend on.

The AGAC traceability system:

All vessels included in this assessment are equipped with an operational Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) controlled by Fisheries Authorities (flag states and coastal countries when the vessels operate within their EEZs). The VMS sends data on location, course, and speed at regular intervals, allowing for the monitoring of fishing activities.

IOTC maintains a minimum 5% observer coverage level requirement for all vessels >24m length overall and all vessels operating of the flag CPC's Exclusive Economic Zone (Res. 24/04), which includes all AGAC vessels. Nevertheless, in 2012 the AGAC fleet voluntarily implemented a Code of Good Practice; since 2015, it guarantees 100% observer (physical and/or electronic) coverage in the whole fleet (noting the challenges posed by Covid-19).

It is noted that catches can be traced back to logbooks (to the specific set / sets that contains extensive information including the fishing location) – this is the responsibility of the Captain who must ensure with the responsible officers that the fish hold plans are correct in this regard. Logbook data can then be cross-checked with landing declarations and then also with invoices from buyers. Note that it is not the responsibility of the onboard observer to confirm the fish hold plan well contents. Several reports/forms are generated at unloading regardless of the RFMO. The assessment team has observed/verified copies of landing certificates where it can be seen that the information gathered can be cross checked with logbooks and invoices as needed.

Record Keeping on AGAC vessels:

Vessel and catch logbooks are electronically recorded and reported. Data recorded on Vessel and Catch/Fishing logbooks include:

- Vessel identification data: name, call sign and country of registration.
- Trip information: port, date, and hour of departure; port, date, and hour of arrival; port or place of unloading; Masters full name.
- Set data stating the time and date when setting the net and catch data after hauling all the fish onboard. Observers and/or EMS analysts do it independently at the same time (beginning and ending of the set).
- Weight of fish caught per set, broken down to species. When possible, fish commercial category is also stated. Note that the weight registered in the logbook is based on a visual estimation by the Captain, and thus is not necessarily accurate and precise. School association (FAD/FSC) is recorded, even though it is not required for eligibility.

Unloading procedures

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The catch can only be transhipped in port to reefer vessels, placed in refrigerated containers or directly unloaded to a cannery. All catch unloaded is recorded by species and weight on unloading. This can be checked against landing forms. This procedure is overseen by a third party (e.g., port inspectors, company representatives) and landing sheets are produced.

Reefer vessel and container’s plans are added to the logged data stating total weight and species and commercial size when available. All this information is combined to produce a Catch Certificate. All transhipments are executed in port. There are procedures that some RFMO have implemented to incorporate provisions of the FAO PSMA and those are complied with (they mostly relate to port states and the fishing industry).

Other obligations come from the “Programme For Transhipment By Large-Scale Fishing Vessels” which incorporates provisions for transhipment in port. No at-sea transhipments are allowed. These measures might vary between RFMOs, and the client adheres to the requirements from each as needed.

If the catch on landing is sent to a cannery or processing plant, the cannery, issues a sales slip with the part of the catch sold directly to them. This sales slip will include data on total weight, separated by species and commercial size. Other documents to verify traceability may also include i) Custom declarations, ii) Catch Certificate; iii) Certificate of Owner(ship), iv) Fish Certificate Discharge issued by the buyer; and v) invoice/s between parties.

Table 13 describes the traceability processes in place, and Table 14 identifies traceability risk factors and how these risks are mitigated by the traceability systems and controls in place for the AGAC IO Fishery.

Table 13: Traceability within the fishery

Statement on fishery’s ability to track and trace to each Unit of Certification
Systems allow the fishery client to track to trace any fish or fish products sold as MSC certified back to the individual UoC.
Movement of fish and fish product between harvest and landing
An illustration of movement of product between harvest and landing. Include when any of the following happen: Harvesting, At-Sea processing, Translocation, Transhipment, Offloading, Landing.
Fishing vessel → Transhipment at port → Offloader → Landing Fishing vessel → Landing to a cannery Fishing vessel → Landing to refrigerated containers
Movement of fish and fish products between landing and start of the CoC if relevant.
An illustration of movement of product between landing and start of CoC. Include when any of the following is happening: Transport, Storage, Sorting/ Grading, Packing, Auction.
N/A as CoC starts at landing.
Description of any processing and sorting/ grading prior to change of ownership
There is no processing prior change of ownership; all tuna is landed whole and round frozen, in bulk and not segregated by species.
For the critical tracking events (i.e. where in the product flow this data needs to be transferred) of all fish and fish product handling and sale not covered by CoC describe: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process of segregating to each Unit of Certification • Key data elements (i.e. the data or documents to identify the UoC such as species, catch area, gear)
Fishing vessel:

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1. all fishing sets are registered in the logbook (time, geographical information, catch per species and set number are always registered, while additional details such as oceanographic information may also be added, for instance).
2. well plans indicate which sets are placed in each well.

Transshipment at port / offloading / landing:

3. the eligible MSC wells will be opened in the authorised ports in the presence of a third party who must sign an annex to the Well's Plan that certifies it corresponds to what is described in the logbook and Plan.
4. Declaration of unloading or transfer certificates/forms are issued.

Sale:

5. Invoices with amounts sold per species are issued.

It is confirmed that the amount of MSC-certified fish per species sold from each sea trip can be traced from the invoice back to the set.

Where there are IPI stock(s) within the scope of certification, describe the verification of traceability systems

N/A – there are no IPI stocks

Other relevant information on the systems to track and trace to each UoC

AGAC has developed a set of rules to manage its certification and every company has signed it. Annex 2 of said document details the necessary documentation to guarantee the traceability of the UoCs. For the last two years, AGAC has been working with Code Contract on a platform to simplify the way all this traceability information gets registered, which is based on the information required on Annex 2 of AGAC-MSC Certification Management Rules, using Blockchain technology.

Table 14: Traceability risks and mitigation within the fishery

Factor	Description of the traceability risk factors and details of the risk mitigation and management Include in each description: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whether each factor occurs • When it occurs and how frequently (e.g. regularly, seasonally, rarely) • How any potential traceability risks are mitigated and any risk management • If covered by information provided elsewhere in the assessment report (such as Table 5 for segregation or in Section 5 MSC Fisheries Standard – Principle 3 – Effective management for regulatory frameworks), cross reference as needed.
Will the fishery use gears that are not part of the UoC? If Yes, include in the description: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If this may occur on the same trip, on the same vessels, or during the same season; • How any risks are mitigated. 	Large tropical tuna purse seiners are designed and built to fish using purse seine gear only. There would be no reason or justification for using a different type of gear on board. The fishing license states this fact and all techniques for setting the gear must be included in the UoC. There is no risk that the fishery will use gears or methods that are not included in the UoC.
Will vessels in the UoC also fish outside the UoC geographic area?	The risk vessels in the UoC also fishing outside the UoC is mitigated via:

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<p>If Yes, include in the description:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If this may occur on the same trip; • How any risks are mitigated. 	<p>All vessels are equipped with VMS and they can be easily tracked by third parties (flag and coastal states)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100% observer coverage (human and/or electronic) is implemented on all vessels; • Both the vessel and observer are required to report latitude and longitude position for every set. The captain includes this information in the fishing logbook and the observer (onboard or on land observer) in the trip report; • Some UoCs might require a unique fishing trip number assigned to the vessel prior to departure. <p>The Captain’s statement, fishing logbook and wells plan may be shared to the first receivers of the fish. This information should be used by the first receivers and CoC auditors to verify MSC eligibility.</p> <p>UoC geographic areas should be described in detail to identify the sets that contain MSC eligible fish.</p>
<p>Do vessels from outside the UoC and/or client group ever fish on the same stock?</p>	<p>Yes – IO YFT is targeted in a variety of fisheries from different countries.</p>
<p>Do the fishery client members ever handle certified and non-certified products during any of the activities covered by the fishery certificate?</p> <p>This refers to both at-sea activities and on-land activities and should reflect those listed in product movement in Table 5. It includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Translocation • Transshipment • Transport • Storage • Processing • Sorting/ grading • Packing • Landing • Auction 	<p><u>Translocation</u></p> <p>Translocation (i.e., movement of product) is addressed in the transport section, below.</p> <p><u>Transshipment</u></p> <p>Transshipment occurs in port, only. Risks and mitigation are addressed in the transshipment section, below.</p> <p><u>Transport and storage:</u></p> <p>The catch is not sorted on the vessel because it would take too long and compromise quality. Instead, it is moved directly to wells after hauling and kept there until the end of the trip. The crew take samples from each set onboard and the resulting catch by species is accurate in terms of the total amount of fish caught. It is not the same for species composition, which is not fully accurate on the well map or logbook. For this reason, there are three separate records with landings records and sale slips being more reliable than logbooks in terms of estimating species composition. An example is the system implemented by the EU which allows differences of up to 10% regarding catch by species on logbooks but the amounts on landing declaration/catch certificates and sales slips shall be fully accurate with no error.</p> <p><u>Processing:</u></p> <p>There is no at-sea processing. All tuna is landed whole and round frozen.</p> <p><u>Sorting or grading and packing</u></p> <p>There is no at-sea sorting or grading, or packing – this only occurs in port. Risks are addressed in the landing section, below.</p> <p><u>Landing:</u></p> <p>The landing ports have been identified (see below)</p>

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	<p>MSC-eligible wells' seals are opened in port in presence of an observer or authorised third parties. Surveyor and/or port officers vary depending on the port of choice. Regular port sampling occurs.</p> <p>Upon delivery to processors or buyers, the fish are sorted and weighed to provide accurate catch data by species. And to check against the landing records during the unloading process.</p> <p>Final catch reporting records are submitted by species to the national authorities in compliance with EU, flag state and the corresponding RFMO requirements.</p> <p><u>Auction / First Hand Sale in ports:</u></p> <p>There is no open auction process for the fish. Landings can go directly to the processing plant where it enters the buyer's CoC or can be shipped to a reefer vessel or refrigerated container for onward locations for either processing or distribution to the market. In the reefer's holds, MSC-eligible catch is labelled and separated by double netting. The containers are identified and sealed until reaching final destination. Couriers delivering fish from port to processors and the reefer vessels will need a CoC certificate.</p> <p>This procedure is documented by landing sheets or delivery certificate, signed by the client's inspector and processing plant's manager/reefer's captain/transport company (containers). In addition, a Catch Certificate is issued and signed by the fishing authorities of the vessel's flag state.</p> <p>A sale slip proves the change of ownership of the delivered catch.</p>
<p>Does transhipment occur within the fishery?</p> <p>If yes, include in the description:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the type of transhipment in-port/ high seas/ other • What are the systems used to track and trace to UoC <p>For high seas transhipment include in the description how the systems to track and trace to the UoC:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are verified independently of the fishery client • Cover all fishing and receiving vessels involved in transhipment • Apply to all transhipment events <p>If any of these 3 criteria above are not met for high seas transhipment CoC certification is required for both the fishing and receiving vessels involved in this transhipment.</p>	<p>There is no at sea transhipment for purse seine vessels.</p> <p>Transhipment, if it occurs, takes place at port, directly from purse seiners to reefer vessels. All transhipped loads are verifiable by species and quantity and no transhipment takes place without the presence of inspectors.</p> <p>The fish is then transported to final destinations for processing or onward marketing. Tuna transferred into reefer vessel holds are weighed on departure and arrival and are separated with cargo netting and are appropriately labelled and tracked. The shipping manifest also includes the cargo weight. Cargo manifests include all weights and products on board each vessel and is a standard maritime transport requirement for cargoes, frozen fish included, to ensure safe transport of cargo by weight and to meet other requirements by customs authorities.</p> <p>NB transporters and reefer vessels will need to enter into and be covered by a CoC certificate</p>
<p>Are trading agents to be covered within the fishery certificate?</p>	<p>No</p>

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If yes, include in the description: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How information on UoC is passed through 	
Are there any other risks of mixing or substitution between certified and non-certified fish? If No, refer to the section describing product movement and segregation which demonstrates this.	No. There are extensive checks and balances in place to ensure certified product is separated from any potential non-certified fish.
Are there any other risks of mixing between different Units of Certification? If Yes, include in the description: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> link to any relevant variations relating to this If No, refer to the section describing product movement and segregation which demonstrates this.	No. The three tuna species are distinguishable and the tracking and tracing systems in place ensure that AGAC product is clearly identifiable as AGAC product.

6.2.1. Traceability within the fishery description

Table 15: Eligibility to enter Chain of Custody (CoC)

Determination on whether fish and fish products from the certified UoC(s) can go onto be sold as certified. Including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whether the ability for fish and fish products to be sold as certified is conditional upon CoC certification. If traceability systems still need to be established prior to either CoC certification OR revised fishery determination.
It is determined that fish and fish products from the certified Units of Certification can go onto be sold as certified.
The point of change of ownership of product to any party not covered by the fishery certificate and detail of any trading between client group members prior to this
Change of ownership occurs at landing (see Table 13).
The point from which subsequent Chain of Custody (CoC) is required The latest this can happen is the point of change of ownership of fish or fish product to any party not covered by the fishery certificate (reference section above) but it may happen sooner in which case describe as per the product flow (in Table 5). Note the requirement for when CoC is required to start on High Seas Transshipment
CoC is required from the point of landing (see Table 13)
The entities, or categories of entities, at the point of landing and/or sale required to have separate CoC including any auctions, selling agents, offloaders or storage facilities and so not covered in the above Tables 6 and 7.
Any entity that wishes to sell AGAC products as MSC certified is required to have appropriate CoC certification.
A list of entities, or categories of entities, eligible to access the certificate and sell product as certified including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confirm if all vessels within the geographic area and gear of the UoC are eligible to sell fish and fish products as certified. Any other limits to vessel types, ownership, client group membership.

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include any trading agents used.
<p>All vessels belonging to AGAC and certified under the UNE 195006 Standard “Atún de Pesca Responsable (APR)”, are eligible to be covered by the MSC certificate are eligible to access the certificate and sell product as certified. However, adherence to said certificate as an eligible fisherman shall be subject to compliance with the policy, terms, and conditions of AGAC and will be certified under UNE 196005 APR Standard.</p>
<p>Points of landing, auctions or other transfer which may be used for the sale of fish from the certified fishery into further chains of custody, either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The geographic region where all landing points are possible, or • Named landing points, auctions, or other transfer sites if there are limits.
<p>The points of landing for the Indian Ocean are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Port Louis (Mauritius) • Diego Suarez (Madagascar) • Port Victoria (Seychelles) • Mombasa (Kenya) • Dar es Salaam (Tanzania) • Duqm (Oman)
<p>Any specific eligibility criteria for product to be sold as certified, or where to find this information where relevant, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Product form. • Trip type (e.g. includes outside EEZ). • Need for Chain of Custody. • Need for trading through client group members.
<p>There are no specific eligibility criteria associated with these products.</p>
<p>How fish or fish products can be identified or can be confirmed as certified at the point it enters certified CoC, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How information on gear, species, stock, area, vessel (where relevant) client group member (where relevant) is provided. • Any segregation to UoC required of first buyers (e.g. sort batches by species). • Where relevant how any specific eligibility criteria can be confirmed by the first buyer (as per section above).
<p>AGAC has developed a set of rules to manage its certification and every company has signed it. Annex 2 of said document details the necessary documentation to guarantee the traceability of the UoCs. For the last two years, AGAC has been working with Code Contract on a platform to simplify the way all this traceability information gets registered, which is based on the information required on Annex 2 of AGAC-MSC Certification Management Rules, using Blockchain technology.</p>
<p>How IPI is identified to first buyers at the point it enters certified CoC where relevant</p>
<p>IPI is N/A</p>

6.3. Eligibility of Inseparable or Practicably Inseparable (IPI) stock(s) to enter further chains of custody

There are no IPI stocks.

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7. Scoring

7.1. Principle 1

7.1.1. Taxonomic classification of yellowfin tuna

The Principle 1 species is yellowfin tuna (*Thunnus albacares*); this species is not a key low trophic level species.

Yellowfin tuna

Class: Actinopterygii

Order: Scombriformes

Family: Scombridae

Genus: *Thunnus*

Species: *T. albacares*

7.1.1.1. Yellowfin tuna biology and stock structure in the Indian Ocean

Yellowfin (*Thunnus albacares*, YFT) is a cosmopolitan species distributed mainly in the tropical and subtropical oceanic waters of the three major oceans, where it forms large schools. Feeding behaviour has been extensively studied and it is largely opportunistic, with a variety of prey species being consumed, including large concentrations of crustaceans that have occurred recently in the tropical areas and small mesopelagic fishes which are abundant in the Arabian Sea. It has also been observed that large individuals can feed on very small prey, thus increasing the availability of food for this species. Archival tagging of YFT has shown that this species can dive very deep (over 1000 m) probably to feed on meso-pelagic prey. Longline catch data indicates that YFT are distributed throughout the entire tropical Indian Ocean. The tag recoveries of the Regional Tuna Tagging Project –Indian Ocean (RTTP-IO) provide evidence of large movements of YFT, thus supporting the assumption of a single stock for the Indian Ocean. The average distance travelled by YFT between being tagged and recovered is 710 nautical miles and show increasing distances as a function of time at sea.

The sizes exploited in the Indian Ocean range from 30 cm to 180 cm fork length. Smaller fish (juveniles) form mixed schools with skipjack and juvenile bigeye tuna and are mainly limited to surface tropical waters, while larger fish are found in surface and sub-surface waters. Intermediate age yellowfin are seldom taken in the industrial fisheries, but are abundant in some artisanal fisheries, mainly in the Arabian Sea.

Spawning occurs mainly from December to March in the equatorial area (0–10°S), with the main spawning grounds west of 75°E. Secondary spawning grounds exist off Sri Lanka and the Mozambique Channel and in the eastern Indian Ocean off Australia. Maturity of yellowfin tuna in the Indian Ocean was recently revised by Zudaire et al. (2022 as referred to in IOTC 2024); length at 50% maturity was updated and estimated both in terms of physiological (75 cm of furcal length) and functional maturity (101.7 cm). Recruitment occurs predominantly in July (as evident in the high catch rates of the Purse seine associated sets in region 1b in the third quarter). Newly recruited fish are primarily caught by the purse seine fishery on floating objects and the pole-and-line fishery in the Maldives. Males are predominant in the catches of larger fish at sizes larger than 150 cm (this is also the case in other oceans).

Medium sized yellowfin concentrates for feeding in the Arabian Sea. Feeding behaviour is largely opportunistic, with a variety of prey species being consumed, including large concentrations of crustacean that have occurred recently in the tropical areas and small mesopelagic fishes which are abundant in the Arabian Sea.

7.1.2. Stock assessment and status (Urtizbera et al. 2024; IOTC 2024c)

The status of yellowfin tuna has been assessed using different approaches. In 2015 Stock Synthesis was used for the first time and estimated that the stock was overfished and overfishing was taking place and an Interim Plan for Rebuilding

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the Indian Ocean Yellowfin Tuna Stock was adopted and later revised. Iterations in years 2016 and 2018 attempted the use of alternative approaches to produce new CPUE abundance indices and the main assumptions were also revised. In these assessments the biomass was estimated again to be under SSB_{MSY} and fishing mortality above F_{MSY} therefore the stock was considered to continue being overfished and overfishing still was happening. The assessment conducted in 2021 used SSIII once again, used a standardized CPUE index from the main longline fleet and included indices from the EU purse-seine fleet and an index from the Maldivian pole and line fishery. Alternative versions of the model were prepared to address different issues in the data, to improve the stability of the model and to explore the effects of alternative assumptions. The results did not differ from those obtained in the 2018 assessment. An external review of this assessment was conducted in 2023 providing recommendations for the next assessment.

The latest assessment continues to use Stock Synthesis III and an age-structured spatially-explicit population model fit to catch data from 1950 to 2023, CPUE abundance indices, length compositions and tagging data. This assessment is an updated version of the 2021 iteration which included recommendations from the 2023 review. The model assumes a single spawning stock in the Indian Ocean but considered 21 fisheries and four disaggregated regions, in each of which a standardized joint CPUE index was obtained from the main longline fleets from 1975-2023 which significantly informed the assessment model. The new index differed from the one used in the 2021 assessment particularly in the northwestern region from 2005 to 2015 and 2019 and 2020 (IOTC 2024c). The longline index also shows a increase in abundance from 2021 to 2023 (Figure 9). Data from regions 1a and 1b were pooled together as a single region and assigned to 1b in the stock assessment model (Urtizbera et al. 2024). CPUE from the EU purse-seine fleet fishing on free schools of fish were included in a subset of models, and indices based on the associative and non-associative dynamics of yellowfin tuna were also considered and their usefulness evaluated. Tag release and recovery data provided some information on abundance, movements and mortality rates. Alternative assumptions regarding changes in the efficiency of the longline fleet were included to account for effort creep. Parameters of growth, maturity and natural mortality were revised.

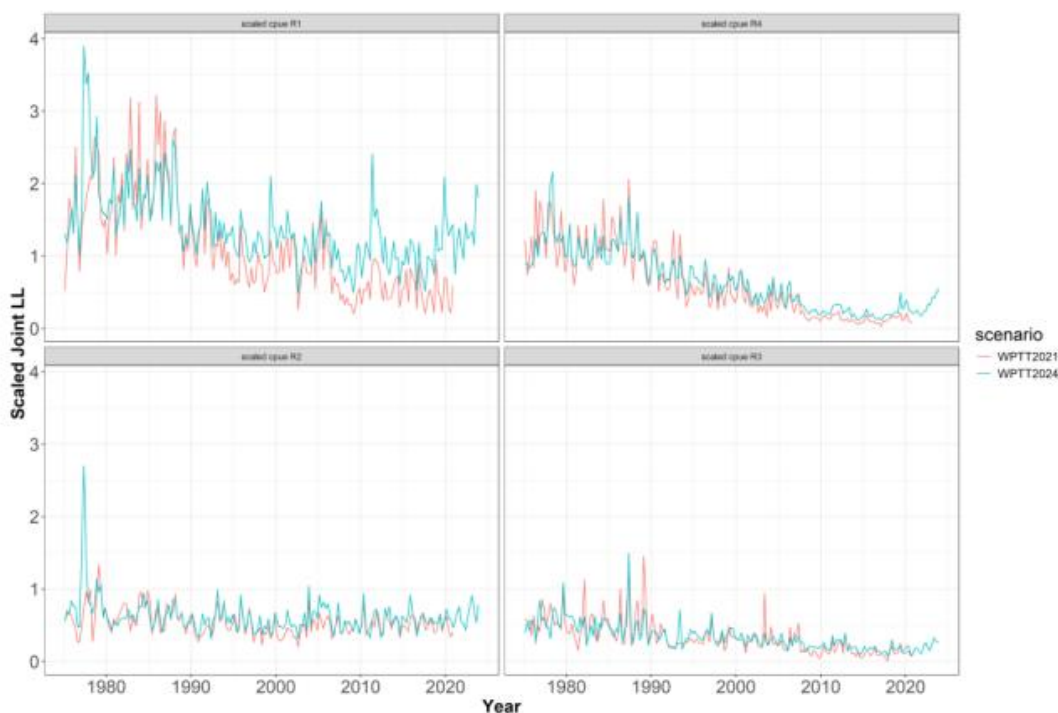


Figure 9. Comparison of time series of standardized CPUE indices of abundance of yellowfin tuna based on joint longline indices by region from 1975 to 2023, the red line represents the indices from the 2021 assessment and the red line the assessment in 2024 (from IOTC 2024c).

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A structural uncertainty grid was used to describe the main sources of uncertainty and included variations in the level of effort creep in the longline CPUE indices, weights assigned to tagging data and alternative values for the recruitment steepness parameter. Additionally, several diagnostics were conducted to identify potential misspecifications in selected reference models.

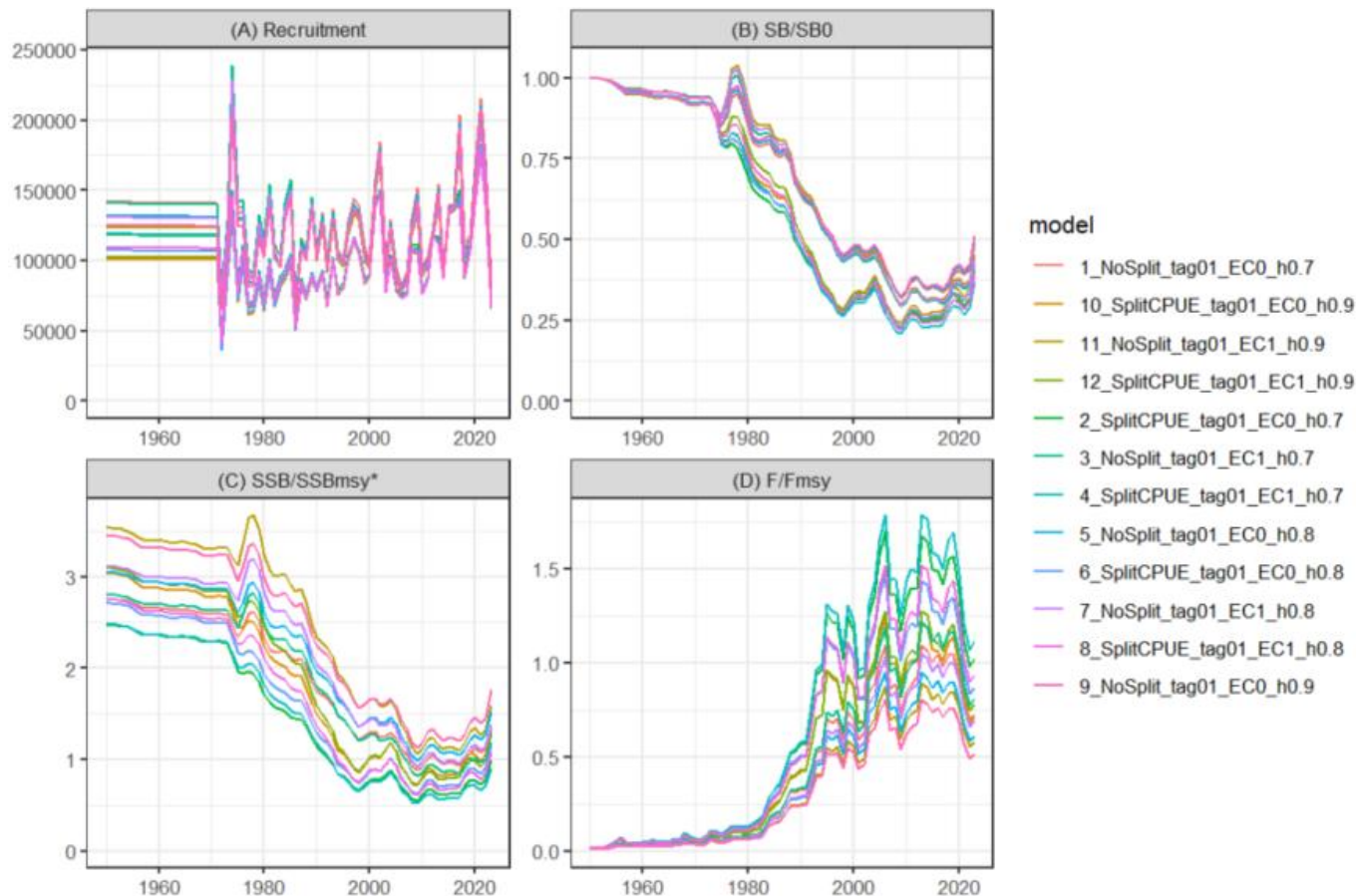


Figure 10. Trends in recruitment, biomass relative to B_0 and B_{MSY} and fishing mortality (F) relative to F_{MSY} for reference models in 2024 of yellowfin tuna in the Indian Ocean (from IOTC 2024c).

The estimated trends in recruitment, biomass relative to B_0 and B_{MSY} and fishing mortality for the reference models of 2024 are shown in Figure 10. Trends in the right panel computed adjusting to account for recruitment variability during the latest 10 years and representing an updated version of the benchmark assessment under current conditions, including apparent increases in recruitment. This version of the assessment is used to evaluate the consequences of alternative catch limit scenarios in Kobe 2 Strategy Matrix projection trials. When looking at the biomass estimated by region, Region 1 presents a declining trend until the late 2000s and then a clear recovery afterwards. In contrast, Region 4 declined to very low levels with an incipient recovery after 2021 Figure 11.

The Working Party on Tropical Tunas presented a lengthy discussion about the different assumptions and differences in opinions and views about the 2024 assessment. The WPTT agreed that projections for management advice should consider the model assuming recruitment for the last 20 years given that this period encompasses the most reliable catch and size composition data leading to better information on stock productivity. It was noted that adopting the alternative assumption for long-term recruitment leads to a lower estimate of SSB_{MSY} .

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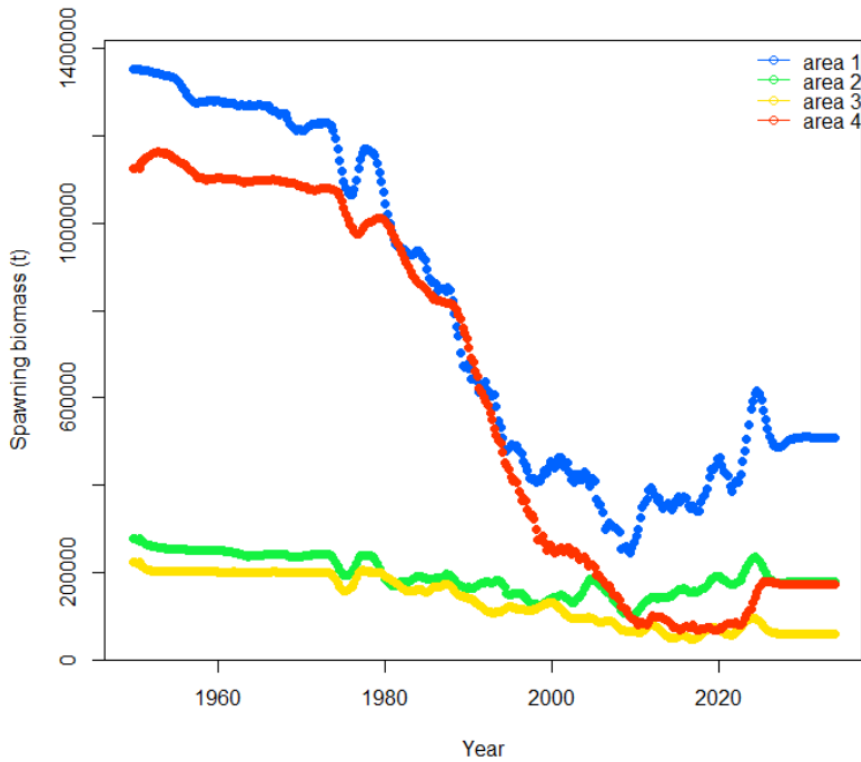


Figure 11. Estimated yellowfin tuna spawning biomass by region in the Indian Ocean for the reference model RM2 (from Urtizberea et al. 2024).

Finally, the WPTT adopted the advice in the stock status summary and recommended this to be provided to the SC for its consideration. The new estimate of MSY is 421,000 t while recent annual catches (“most recent 20 years”) have been 401,000 t and the catch of 2023 was 400,959 t. The difference between long-term and recent estimates of MSY and BMSY are noted in the following table and are observed as part of the implicit uncertainty in the estimates of management quantities. It is considered however that estimates of stock status from fishing mortality are insensitive to these conditions (IOTC 2024c).

Long term MSY (t)	Recent 20 yr MSY (t)	Long term SSBmsy (t)	Recent 20 yr SSBMSY (t)
374,421	420,623	986,599	1094,844

A synthesis of the current status of YFT in the Indian Ocean is included in Appendix VI and is represented in the following table (Table 16IOTC 2024c). Past assessments estimated that the probability that the stock was in the red zone was 94% in 2015, declining to 67.6% in 2016 and 67% in 2021. Results of the 2024 assessment are significantly different from those in previous assessments, and the probability that the stock is in the red zone is now estimated to be just 7.9%. Spawning biomass in 2023 is also now estimated to be 32% higher than SB_{MSY} and fishing mortality was estimated to be 25% lower than F_{MSY} . The probability that the stock is in the green area of the Kobe quadrant was estimated to be close to 89%, therefore it was concluded that the stock of yellowfin tuna in the Indian Ocean currently is not overharvested and not subject to overfishing. It is also estimated that if catches continue to be within the range of MSY (416,000 to 430,000 t), there is more than 50% probability that the stock will remain above the estimated level SB_{MSY} .

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Table 16. Summary stock status and management advice for Indian Ocean YFT, 2024 (IOTC 2024c).

Area ¹	Indicators		2024 stock status determination ³
Indian Ocean	Catch 2023 ² (t)	400,950	89%*
	Mean annual catch 2019-2023 (t)	423,142	
	MSY _{recent} ⁴ (1,000 t) (80% CI)	421 (416-430)	
	F _{MSY} (80% CI)	0.2 (0.16-0.26)	
	SB _{MSY_recent} (1,000 t) (80% CI)	1,063 (890-1,361)	
	F ₂₀₂₃ / F _{MSY} (80% CI)	0.75 (0.58-1.01)	
SB ₂₀₂₃ / SB _{MSY_recent} (80% CI)	1.32 (1.00-1.59)		
SB ₂₀₂₃ / SB ₀ (80% CI)	0.44 (0.40-0.50)		

¹Boundaries for the Indian Ocean stock assessment are defined as the IOTC area of competence

²Proportion of 2023 catch fully or partially estimated by IOTC Secretariat: 33.4%

³2023 is the final year that data were available for this assessment

⁴Recent refers to the most recent 20 years

Colour key	Stock overfished (SB ₂₀₂₀ / SB _{MSY} <1)	Stock not overfished (SB ₂₀₂₀ / SB _{MSY} ≥ 1)
Stock subject to overfishing (F ₂₀₂₃ / F _{MSY} ≥ 1)	7.9%	3.3%
Stock not subject to overfishing (F ₂₀₂₃ / F _{MSY} ≤ 1)	0%	88.8%
Not assessed / Uncertain / Unknown		

7.1.3. Management and the Harvest Strategy

MSC defines the harvest strategy as a combination of monitoring, stock assessment, HCRs and management measures, and its degree of interaction should also be assessed when working together to achieve the management objective to maintain the stock at consistent Maximum Sustainable Yield level (MSY).

In Resolution 12/01 (IOTC 2012a) the IOTC agrees to apply the precautionary approach, in accordance with relevant internationally agreed standards, in particular with the guidelines set forth in the UNFSA, and to ensure the sustainable utilisation of fisheries resources as set forth in Article V of the IOTC Agreement. Resolution 12/01 also indicates that the IOTC shall adopt harvest control rules as management actions to be taken as reference points are approached or breached.

Article XII of the IOTC Agreement indicates that a Scientific Committee shall provide advice to the Commission on technical matters to support the conservation and management of fishery resources. To this end, the Scientific Committee shall conduct assessments of status and trends of the fish resources and the impact of fishing, as well as to conduct other activities such as promote cooperation on research programmes and provide advice to the Commission. Regular stock assessments are performed and therefore monitoring is in place that is expected to determine whether the harvest strategy is working. According to Resolution 15/10 (IOTC 2024d), the management goals of the Commission are to:

- i. Maintain the biomass at or above levels required to produce MSY or its proxy and maintain the fishing mortality rate at or below F_{MSY} or its proxy;
- ii. Avoid the biomass being below B_{LIM} and the fishing mortality rate being above F_{LIM};

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On these bases and observing the recommendation in Article 7.5.3 of FAO's Code of Conduct, the Commission should implement stock specific target and limit reference points. Specifically, Resolution 15/10 indicates that where possible, the Scientific Committee should apply MSY-based target and limit reference points and in particular, the interim target (B_{MSY} and F_{MSY}) and limit ($B_{LIM} = 0.40 B_{MSY}$ and $F_{LIM} = 1.40 F_{MSY}$) reference points. In case the Scientific Committee cannot provide MSY-based reference points, limit reference points are to be defined relative to B_0 , specifically, the interim B_{LIM} will be set at $0.2 B_0$ and the fishing mortality rate limit reference point at $F_{0.2 B_0}$. These interim reference points had to be revised by 2018 at the latest, but no evidence was found with such revision; Williams and Preece (2022; 2025) and Kolody and Jumppanen (2016) reported results of analyses of management procedures and MSE using the reference points in Resolution 15/10 (except for BET which in the first two reports used 0.1 as limit). Similarly, for the target reference point, the level of B_{TARGET} could be set at a fraction of B_0 and F_{TARGET} at a value of F producing B_{TARGET} , without such fractions being predetermined.

To ensure that management measures are applied effectively by the CPCs, Resolution 17/02 established a Working Party on the Implementation of Conservation and Management Measures (WPICMM). The objectives of this Working Party are:

- a) *Alleviate the technical discussions, workload and time pressures on the Compliance Committee, and permit it to focus on higher level compliance implementation strategies in its work for the Commission;*
- b) *Enhance the technical capacity of Contracting Party (Member) and Cooperating Non-Contracting Party (CNCP) (collectively termed CPCs) to understand and implement IOTC Conservation and Management Measures (CMMs);*
- c) *Prioritise implementation issues and develop operational standards for use by CPCs.*

Resolution 16/01 established an Interim Plan for Rebuilding the Indian Ocean Yellowfin Tuna Stock in the IOTC Area of Competence. Resolution 16/01 aimed to restore by 2024 the YFT stock in the Indian Ocean to levels above the interim target reference point with a probability of 50%.

The plan outlined in Resolution 16/01 included measures for purse seiners such as reductions in catch, limits on the number of FADs operated, reductions and restrictions on the operation of supply vessels. Other measures are applied to longline and gillnet boats, as well as measures applicable to the artisanal fishery. The original measures have been revised in subsequent meetings of the Commission and adjusted depending on the results of the stock assessments (see IOTC 2024d to track changes to active Resolutions that were adopted in past meetings and have been amended). In particular, Resolutions 19/01 and 21/01, as required, revised measures applicable to catch limits, overcatch of catch limits, supply vessels, gillnet boats and a set of administrative actions that keep track of limits, data, determined actions by the Compliance Committee, and other actions that relate to the functions of the Commission to implement management measures.

To complement the measures in Resolutions 16/01 to 21/01, and as precautionary measure, the IOTC adopted Resolution 23/03 on Establishing a Voluntary Fishing Closure in the Indian Ocean for the Conservation of Tropical Tunas. This Resolution encouraged that, starting in 2024, all CPCs to ensure that their vessels fishing for tropical tunas, including yellowfin, do not fish in the area of competence of the IOTC for a minimum of 31 consecutive days decided in advance. Alternatively, CPCs may implement voluntary catch reductions for yellowfin tuna and other species of tropical tuna if they choose to do so voluntarily. Further, Resolution 24/02 on Management of Drifting Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) in the IOTC Area of Competence specifies the establishment of a dFAD register to catalogue dFAD use, with the number of instrumented buoys permitted to be used at one time decreasing progressively from the current limit of 300 (Resolution 19-02) to 250 in 2026 and 225 in 2028.

7.1.4. Harvest Control Rule

As previously stated, the IOTC has established in Resolution 15/10 the following management objectives:

- i. *Maintain the biomass at or above levels required to produce MSY or its proxy and maintain the fishing mortality rate at or below F_{MSY} or its proxy;*

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- ii. *Avoid the biomass being below BLIM and the fishing mortality rate being above FLIM;*

To meet this objectives the following guidelines are provided:

- i. *For a stock where the assessed status places it within the lower right (green) quadrant of the Kobe Plot, aim to maintain the stock with a high probability within this quadrant;*
- ii. *For a stock where the assessed status places it within the upper right (orange) quadrant of the Kobe Plot, aim to end overfishing with a high probability in as short a period as possible;*
- iii. *For a stock where the assessed status places it within the lower left (yellow) quadrant of the Kobe plot, aim to rebuild these stocks in as short a period as possible;*
- iv. *For a stock where the assessed status places it within the upper left quadrant (red), aim to end overfishing with a high probability and to rebuild the biomass of the stock in as short a period as possible.*

Annex 1 of Resolution 15/10 also requested that the IOTC's Scientific Committee evaluates the performance of Harvest Control Rules by means of management strategy evaluation (MSE) to achieve the pre-agreed reference points with high probability and accounting for associated uncertainty.

7.1.5. Information and monitoring

In accordance with the provisions of Article IX, paragraph 1 of the IOTC Agreement, the following is in place:

- *Each flag CPC shall ensure that all purse seine, longline, gillnet, pole and line, handline and trolling fishing vessels flying its flag and authorised to fish species managed by IOTC be subject to a data recording system.*
- *The measure shall apply to all purse seine, longline, gillnet, pole and line, handline and trolling fishing vessels over 24 metres length overall and those under 24 metres if they fish outside the EEZs of their flag States within the IOTC area of competence.*
- *All vessels shall keep a bound paper or electronic logbook to record data that includes operational, catch and effort information.*
- *The Flag State shall provide all the data for any given year to the IOTC Secretariat by June 30th of the following year on an aggregated basis.*

Resolution 15/01 (IOTC 2024d) adopted the agreement that Contracting Parties and Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties (CPCs) shall ensure that all vessels using purse-seines, longline, gillnets, pole and line, handline and trolling authorized to fish species management under the IOTC, be subject to a data recording system.

Resolution 15/02 (IOTC 2024d) CPCs shall provide the following information to the IOTC Secretariat:

- *Total catch data: Estimates of the total catch by species and gear, if possible quarterly, that shall be submitted annually (separated, whenever possible, by retained catches in live weight and by discards in live weight or numbers) for all species under the IOTC mandate.*
- *Catch and effort data: For surface fisheries: catch weight by species and fishing effort shall be provided by 1° grid area and month strata. Purse seine and pole and line fisheries data shall be stratified by fishing mode (e.g. free-swimming schools or schools in association with floating objects). The data shall be extrapolated to the total national monthly catches for each gear. Documents describing the extrapolation procedures (including raising factors corresponding to the logbook coverage) shall also be submitted routinely. Effort units reported should be consistent with those effort requirements of Resolution 15/01 (or any subsequent superseding revision)*

The information and monitoring process in the tropical tuna fishery in the Indian Ocean is conducted by means of a Regional Observer Scheme (ROS) described in detail in Resolution 24/04 (IOTC 2024d), which supersedes Resolutions

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11/04, 16/04 and 22/04. According to this Resolution, the objective of the ROS is “to collect verified catch data and other scientific data related to the fisheries for tuna and tuna-like species in the IOTC area of competence”. Next, a summary of relevant issues in this Resolution are presented.

The collection of scientific data is done by observers monitoring at least 5 % of the number of operations/sets for each gear type by the fleet of each CPC while fishing in the IOTC area of competence of 24 meters overall length and over. However, this minimum observer coverage may be complemented or substituted by an Electronic Monitoring System (EMS) provided that it meets the minimum requirements of the ROS data reporting standards. CPCs may present a list of implementation plans for alternative data collection.

Observers shall:

- a) Record and report fishing activities, verify positions of the vessel;
- b) Observe and estimate catches as far as possible with a view to identifying catch composition and monitoring discards, by-catches and size frequency;
- c) Record the gear type, mesh size and attachments employed by the master;
- d) Collect information to enable the cross-checking of entries made to the logbooks (species composition and quantities, live and processed weight and location, where available); and
- e) Carry out some scientific work (for example, collecting samples), as requested by the IOTC Scientific Committee.

A range of environmental indices are obtained to characterise seasonal and temporal variation in the oceanographic conditions in the Indian Ocean. These indices are primarily defined to investigate the potential for environmental covariates to be incorporated in the estimation of the movement of fish between adjacent model regions.

Major data categories available to IOTC (IOTC, 2019e) include total annual retained catches (in live weight) and discards (in live weight and number), estimated per fleet, IOTC Area, gear and year for a large area. If these data are not reported the Secretariat estimates a total catch from a range of sources (including: partial catch and effort data; data in the FAO FishStat database; catches estimated by the IOTC from data collected through port sampling; data published through web pages or other means; and data reported by parties on the activity of vessels under their flag (IOTC Resolution 10/08 (IOTC, 2010); IOTC Resolution 12/05, IOTC, 2012b) or other flags (IOTC Resolution 14/05, (IOTC, 2014); IOTC Resolution 05/03, (IOTC, 2005)); data on imports of bigeye tuna from vessels under the flag concerned (IOTC Resolution 01/06, (IOTC, 2001)); and data on imports of tropical tunas from canning factories collaborating with the International Seafood Sustainability Foundation.

Catch and effort data refers to the fine-scale data – usually from logbooks – reported in aggregated format: per fleet, year, gear, type of school, month, grid and species. Information on the use of fish aggregating devices (FADs) and activity of vessels that assist industrial purse seiners to locate tuna schools (supply vessels) is also collected. Length frequency data; individual body lengths of IOTC species per fleet, year, gear, type of school, month and 5°x5° degrees square areas.

Tagging data Release and recovery data gathered in the framework of the Indian Ocean Tuna Tagging Programme (IOTTP), which encompass data gathered during the Regional Tuna Tagging Project – Indian Ocean (RTTP-IO) and data gathered during a series of small-scale tuna tagging projects in Maldives, India, Mayotte, Indonesia and by other institutions, e.g., SEAFDEC, NRIFSF, with the support of IOTC. In 2012, the data from past projects implemented in Maldives in the 1990s was added to the tagging database at the Secretariat, and as of September 2019 this database contains 219,121 releases and 34,352 recoveries.

In summary, a comprehensive range of information (on stock structure, stock productivity, fleet composition, stock abundance, UoA removals and other information such as environmental information), including some that may not be directly related to the current harvest strategy, is available.

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7.1.6. Principle 1 catch – UoA 4, YFT

Table 17: Total Allowable Catch (TAC) and catch data

TAC / Catch Data	Year	Amount
Catch limit (as derived from Res. 21-01)	2023	398,000 t
UoA share of the catch limit	2023	44,575.5 t
Total catch by UoC (2023)	2023	40,608 t
Total catch by UoC (2022)	2022	40,724 t

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7.2. Principle 1 Performance Indicator scores and rationales

PI 1.1.1 – Stock status

PI 1.1.1		The stock is at a level that maintains high productivity and has a low probability of recruitment overfishing		
Scoring issue		SG 60	SG 80	SG 100
a	Stock status relative to recruitment impairment			
	Guidepost	It is likely that the stock is above the point of recruitment impairment (PRI).	It is highly likely that the stock is above the PRI.	There is a high degree of certainty that the stock is above the PRI.
	Met?	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rationale		<p>The MSC fisheries standard requires at the SG80 and SG100 level that the stock is highly likely to be above the PRI or there is a high degree of certainty that it is above the PRI, respectively. The IOTC defined that the biomass limit reference point for this fishery is $0.4 B_{MSY}$, which the SA team is assuming to be equivalent to the PRI for YFT, noting that $0.4 B_{MSY}$ is still consistent with the MSC interpretation of a PRI to be “the point below which there is an increased risk that recruitment may be substantially impaired”. Also, it is noted that this value is slightly lower than the MSC default of $0.5 B_{MSY}$ for stocks where the limit reference point has not been analytically obtained.</p> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>2018</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>2021</p> </div>		

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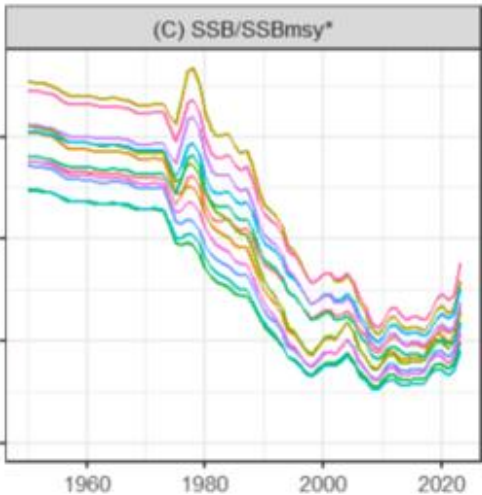
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	<div style="text-align: center;">  <p>2024</p> </div> <p>Figure 1.1.1.a. Estimated trends of spawning biomass relative to the level producing MSY obtained in the 2018, 2021 and 2024 stock assessments (top to bottom, respectively – Fu et al. 2018, Fu et al. 2021 and Urtizberea et al. 2024).</p> <p>Panel C in Figure 10 shows the estimated trend in biomass relative to B_{MSY} under a series of assumptions represented in alternative model scenarios, noting that under the least optimistic scenario the estimated abundance has never been at or below $0.5 B_{MSY}$. Furthermore, the estimated abundance trend and stock status in the 2024 assessment are more optimistic than those obtained in the 2018 and 2021 assessment (Fu et al. 2018; Fu et al. 2021), but in all cases there appears to be zero probability that the stock is under $0.5 B_{MSY}$ (Fig 1.1.1.a, above).</p> <p>The Kobe quadrant in Appendix VI indicates there is a combined probability that the stock is under B_{MSY} and above F_{MSY} of 7.9%. The team concluded that if the last three assessments with all their caveats an even in the least optimistic scenarios the stock has a probability lower than 5% to be under $0.5 B_{MSY}$, then the fishery meets the requirements at both SG80 and SG100.</p>		
b	Stock status in relation to achievement of maximum sustainable yield (MSY)		
	Guidepost		<p>The stock is at or fluctuating around a level consistent with MSY.</p> <p>There is a high degree of certainty that the stock has been fluctuating around a level consistent with MSY or has been above this level over recent years.</p>
Rationale	Met?		<p>Yes</p> <p>No</p>
	<p>The MSC fisheries standard requires at the SG80 and SG100 level that either the stock is at or fluctuating at a level consistent with MSY or there is a high degree of certainty that it has been fluctuating around a level consistent with MSY or has been above this level over recent years.</p> <p>Results of the recent stock assessment indicate the estimated trends of abundance under alternative model assumptions, for the last 20 years, the stock has been fluctuating around the estimated abundance producing MSY (see Figure 10(C)). This pattern is more evident in the</p>		

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trend for the reference model in the 2024 assessment, which also shows an increase in abundance in the latest years that are consistent with the observed trend in the longline CPUE.

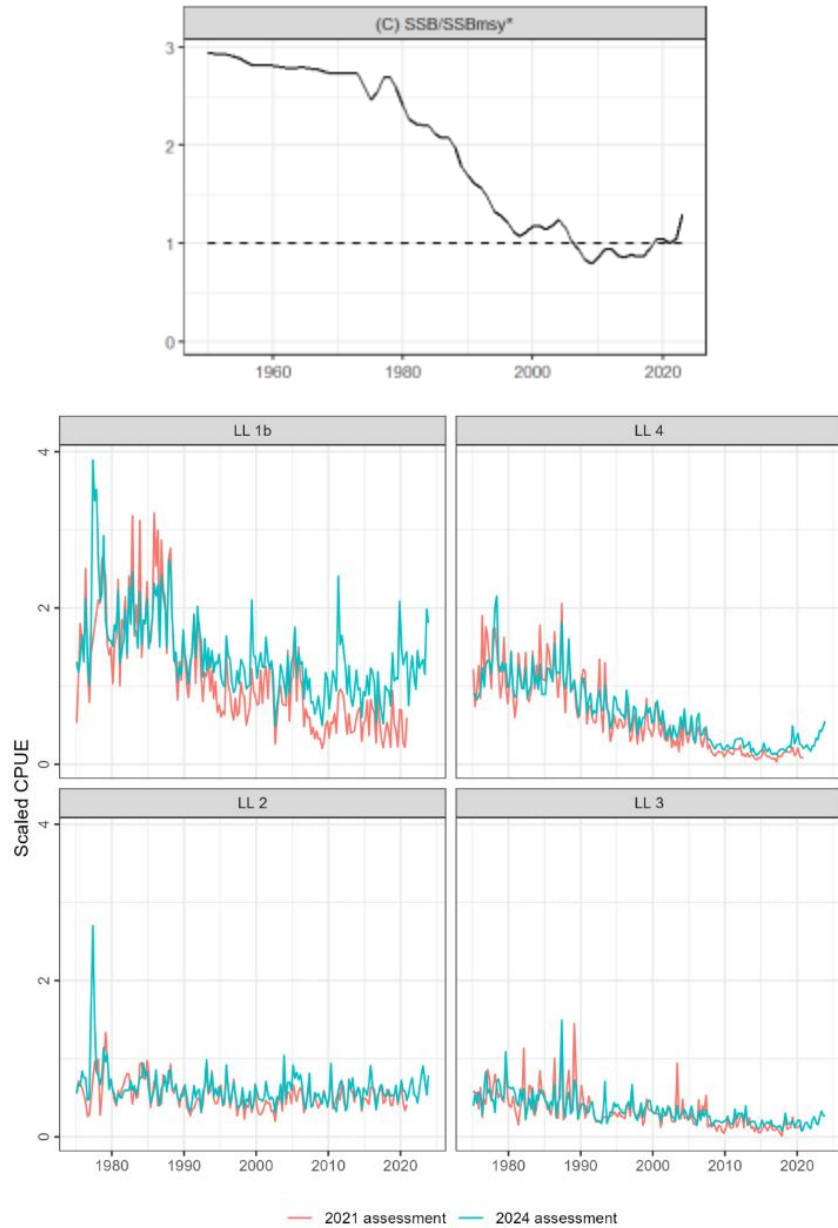


Figure 1.1.1.b. Estimated trend in spawning biomass abundance relative to the level producing MSY (top panel) and CPUE indices of relative abundance from the longline fishery by region (bottom panel) (from IOTC 2024c).

The Guidance to the Fisheries Certification Requirements presents the example (p 375) that an “instantaneous estimate of current stock status that is not less than 90% B_{MSY}” can be regarded as evidence that the stock is fluctuating around a level consistent with MSY and can meet the requirements at SG80. The Guidance also warns that the 90% level is only presented to illustrate criteria to meet the requirements at SG80 and that teams should assess the fishery

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based on the criteria of fluctuation around B_{MSY} . In the case of the YFT in the Indian Ocean, the instantaneous estimate of stock status for the last four years places biomass above the estimated B_{MSY} , making it possible to conclude that at least, the stock is fluctuating around a level consistent with MSY and the fishery **meets the requirements at SG80**.

To determine if there is a high degree of certainty that the stock has been fluctuating around a level consistent with MSY, the Guidance suggests that as examples, either the median or mean stock abundance has been at a level not less than 90% B_{MSY} over the last two generation times. Alternatively, estimates of abundance placing abundance above the estimated B_{MSY} in all years at least one generation time can be appropriate evidence to support the conclusion that the fishery meets the requirements at SG100. In the case of the YFT in the Indian Ocean, there is still substantial uncertainty associated to the current stock status and the latest assessments may place it either above or below B_{MSY} . It is acknowledged that improvements in the performance of the last assessment methodology led to more optimistic results than in the previous iterations, however, the team considered that the assessment methodology is still in the process of resolving important uncertainties and may prevent a conclusion on high degree of certainty, therefore **SG100 is not met** yet.

Stock status relative to reference points			
	Type of reference point	Value of reference point	Current stock status relative to reference point
Reference point used in scoring stock relative to PRI (S1a)	SB_{LIMIT} F_{LIM}	$0.40 SB_{MSY} = 425.2$ $1.4 F_{MSY} = 0.28$	$SB_{2023}/SB_{LIM} = 3.3$ $F_{2023}/F_{LIM} = 0.54$
Reference point used in scoring stock relative to MSY (S1b)	$SB_{TARGET}=SB_{MSY}$ (in thousands of t) $F_{TARGET} = F_{MSY}$ MSY_{RECENT} (in thousands of t; recent means the most recent 20 years)	$SB_{MSY}=1,063$ (890-1,361) $F_{MSY}=0.2$ (0.16-0.26 80% CI) $MSY_{RECENT} = 421$ (416-430)	$SB_{2023} / SB_{MSY_recent} = 1.32$ (1.0-1.59) $F_{2023} / F_{MSY} = 0.75$ (0.58-1.01) Catch ₂₀₂₃ = 400.95 Mean annual catch 2019-2023 = 423.14

Draft scoring range and information gap indicator included in Announcement Comment Draft Report stage only

Draft scoring range	≥80
Information gap indicator	Information sufficient to score PI

Overall Performance Indicator scores added from Client and Peer Review Draft Report stage

Overall Performance Indicator score	90
Condition number (if relevant)	N/A

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PI 1.1.2 – Stock rebuilding

PI 1.1.2	Where the stock is reduced, there is evidence of stock rebuilding within a specified timeframe		
Scoring issue	SG 60	SG 80	SG 100
a	Rebuilding timeframes		
	Guide post	A rebuilding timeframe is specified for the stock that is the shorter of 20 years or 2 times its generation time . For cases where 2 generations is less than 5 years, the rebuilding timeframe is up to 5 years.	The shortest practicable rebuilding timeframe is specified that does not exceed 1 generation time for the stock.
	Met?	Yes / No	Yes / No
Rationale	Since 1.1.1 scores ≥ 80 , this is not scored		
b	Rebuilding evaluation		
	Guide post	Monitoring is in place to determine whether the rebuilding strategies are effective in rebuilding the stock within the specified timeframe.	There is evidence that the rebuilding strategies are rebuilding stocks, or it is likely based on simulation modelling, exploitation rates, or previous performance that they will be able to rebuild the stock within the specified timeframe .
	Met?	Yes / No	Yes / No
Rationale	Since 1.1.1 scores ≥ 80 , this is not scored		

Draft scoring range and information gap indicator included in Announcement Comment Draft Report stage only

Draft scoring range	N/A
Information gap indicator	N/A

Overall Performance Indicator scores added from Client and Peer Review Draft Report stage

Overall Performance Indicator score	N/A
Condition number (if relevant)	N/A

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PI 1.2.1 – Harvest strategy

PI 1.2.1		There is a robust and precautionary harvest strategy in place		
Scoring issue	SG 60	SG 80	SG 100	
a	Harvest strategy design			
	Guide post	The harvest strategy is expected to achieve stock management objectives reflected in PI 1.1.1 SG80.	The harvest strategy is responsive to the state of the stock and the elements of the harvest strategy work together towards achieving stock management objectives reflected in PI 1.1.1 SG80.	The harvest strategy is responsive to the state of the stock and is designed to achieve stock management objectives reflected in PI 1.1.1 SG80.
	Met?	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rationale		<p>The MSC Vocabulary v1.1 defines a harvest strategy as “<i>the combination of monitoring, stock assessment, harvest control rules and management actions, which may include an MP or an MP (implicit) and be tested by MSE</i>”. In the evaluation of the design of the harvest strategy, to achieve SG80, its elements must work together to achieve the objectives defined in PI 1.1.1 and allowing the management system to be responsive to the state of the stock. At the SG100, the strategy must have been designed to achieve the objectives in PI 1.1.1. The MSC Fisheries Standard V2.01 does not include a definition of the term <i>designed</i>, but different definitions of <i>design</i> in the Merriam-Webster dictionary include, “to create, fashion, execute, or construct according to plan”, “to devise for a specific function or end”, “to conceive or execute a plan” and “deliberate purposive planning”.</p> <p>The Agreement for the Establishment of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) is the document providing structure and guidance about the goals and duties of Commission and Members and Associate Members of FAO, including participating parties (from now on referred to as the Contracting Parties to the Commission or CPC), Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties and Non-Contracting Parties. The Commission is established within the framework of the United Nations FAO (FAO 1993). The first objective of the IOTC is to promote cooperation among Members for the conservation and optimum utilization of the stocks under the reach of the Agreement. The second objective includes among other things, the monitoring of conditions and trends of stocks and to analyse and distribute fishery related information; to promote research; to utilise the results of research to adopt conservation and management measures towards the optimum use of the stocks. The third objective presents the possibility for the Commission to adopt decisions and recommendations to achieve the objectives of the Agreement.</p> <p>In accordance with the provisions of Article IX, paragraph 1 of the IOTC Agreement, the following is in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each flag CPC shall ensure that all purse seine, longline, gillnet, pole and line, handline and trolling fishing vessels flying its flag and authorised to fish species managed by IOTC be subject to a data recording system. • The measure shall apply to all purse seine, longline, gillnet, pole and line, handline and trolling fishing vessels over 24 metres length overall and those under 24 metres if they fish outside the EEZs of their flag States within the IOTC area of competence. • All vessels shall keep a bound paper or electronic logbook to record data that includes operational, catch and effort information. • The Flag State shall provide all the data for any given year to the IOTC Secretariat by June 30th of the following year on an aggregated basis. 		

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PI 1.2.1	There is a robust and precautionary harvest strategy in place
	<p>Following Resolution 15-01 (IOTC 2015c) there is a call upon States, either individually, collectively or through regional fisheries management organisations and arrangements included in the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 67/79 on sustainable fisheries to collect the necessary data in order to evaluate and closely monitor the use of large-scale fish aggregating devices and others, as appropriate, and their effects on tuna resources and tuna behaviour and associated and dependent species, to improve management procedures to monitor the number, type and use of such devices to mitigate possible negative effects on the ecosystem, including on juveniles and the incidental bycatch of non-target species, particularly sharks and turtles.</p> <p>Further, following Resolution 15/02 Contracting Parties and Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties (CPCs) shall provide the following information to the IOTC Secretariat:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Total catch data: Estimates of the total catch by species and gear, if possible quarterly, that shall be submitted annually (separated, whenever possible, by retained catches in live weight and by discards in live weight or numbers) for all species under the IOTC mandate</i> • <i>Catch and effort data: For surface fisheries: catch weight by species and fishing effort shall be provided by 1° grid area and month strata. Purse seine and pole and line fisheries data shall be stratified by fishing mode (e.g. free-swimming schools or schools in association with floating objects). The data shall be extrapolated to the total national monthly catches for each gear. Documents describing the extrapolation procedures (including raising factors corresponding to the logbook coverage) shall also be submitted routinely. Effort units reported should be consistent with those effort requirements of Resolution 15/01 (or any subsequent superseding revision).</i> <p>The collection of scientific data is done by observers (Resolution 24/04) who monitor at least 5 % of the number of operations/sets for each gear type by the fleet of each CPC while fishing in the IOTC area of competence of 24 meters overall length and over.</p> <p>Observers:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Record and report fishing activities, verify positions of the vessel; b) Observe and estimate catches as far as possible with a view to identifying catch composition and monitoring discards, by-catches and size frequency; c) Record the gear type, mesh size and attachments employed by the master; d) Collect information to enable the cross-checking of entries made to the logbooks (species composition and quantities, live and processed weight and location, where available); and e) Carry out such scientific work (for example, collecting samples), as requested by the IOTC Scientific Committee. <p>In Resolution 12/01 the IOTC agrees to apply the precautionary approach, in accordance with relevant internationally agreed standards, in particular with the guidelines set forth in the UNFSA, and to ensure the sustainable utilization of fisheries resources as set forth in Article V of the IOTC Agreement.</p> <p>Regular stock assessments are performed and therefore monitoring is in place that is expected to determine whether the harvest strategy is working. Resolution 15/10 (IOTC 2015a) has set interim target (B_{MSY} and F_{MSY}) and limit ($B_{LIM} = 0.40 B_{MSY}$ and $F_{LIM} = 1.40 F_{MSY}$) reference points for YFT and 19/01 and 21/01 (IOTC, 2024d) determines the cuts of catches of the 2014 (or other alternative time-period, where applicable) reference catch level, therefore the harvest strategy is expected to achieve stock management objectives reflected in PI 1.1.1 SG80. The overall effect, therefore, of Resolutions 12/01, 15/10, 19/01 and 21/01 is to provide interim elements of the harvest strategy</p>

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PI 1.2.1	There is a robust and precautionary harvest strategy in place			
	<p>that are intended to ensure that the stock is maintained around the target reference points (B_{MSY} and F_{MSY}), implying the intention of Resolutions 12/01, 15/10, 19/01 and 21/01 to be consistent with appropriate management and therefore SG60 is met.</p> <p>In 2016, Resolution 16/01 presented an interim Plan for Rebuilding the Indian Ocean Yellowfin Tuna Stock in the IOTC Area of Competence. Resolution 16/01 aimed to restore by 2024 the YFT stock in the Indian Ocean to levels above the interim target reference point with a probability of 50%. This Resolution included measures for purse seiners such as reductions in catch, limits on the number of FADs operated, reductions and restrictions on the operation of supply vessels. The stock assessment of 2024 (Utizberea et al. 2024; IOTC 2024c) estimated that the spawning biomass of YFT in the Indian Ocean was 32% above the level producing MSY, while fishing mortality was estimated to be 75% of the level producing MSY. The catch in 2023 was 5% lower than the MSY value for the most recent 20 years.</p> <p>Because the estimated stock status in 2023 is consistent with the goal established in 2016 in Resolution 16/01, the harvest strategy can be considered to be responsive to the state of the stock and the evidence indicates that monitoring and stock assessments led to conservation and management decision leading to recover the stock to MSY based reference points, therefore, the elements of the harvest strategy are considered to work together towards achieving stock management objectives reflected in PI 1.1.1, SG80 is met. Because, in addition to the strategy being responsive to the state of the stock, it was designed to respond in a way to meet MSY based management objectives, the concluded that the fishery meets SG100.</p>			
b	Harvest strategy evaluation			
	Guide post	The harvest strategy is likely to work based on prior experience or plausible argument.	The harvest strategy may not have been fully tested but evidence exists that it is achieving its objectives.	The performance of the harvest strategy has been fully evaluated and evidence exists to show that it is achieving its objectives including being clearly able to maintain stocks at target levels.
	Met?	Yes	Yes	No
Rationale	<p>At the SG60 level, SIb requires that the harvest strategy is likely to work based on prior experience or plausible argument, whereas at SG80, even if not fully tested, evidence is required to exist that the harvest strategy is achieving its objectives.</p> <p>The overall effect of Resolutions 12/01, 15/10, 18/01, 19/01, 21/01 and 23/03 is to provide interim elements of the harvest strategy that are intended to ensure that the stock is maintained around the target reference points (B_{MSY} and F_{MSY}), implying the intention of Resolutions 12/01, 15/10, 19/01 and 21/01 to be consistent with appropriate management. Resolution 15/10 has set interim target (B_{MSY} and F_{MSY}) and limit ($B_{LIM} = 0.40 B_{MSY}$ and $F_{LIM} = 1.40 F_{MSY}$) reference points for YFT and 19/01 and 21/01 determine the cuts of catches of the 2014 (or other alternative time-period, where applicable) reference catch level. Therefore, the harvest strategy is likely to work based on plausible argument and SG60 is met.</p> <p>The stock assessment of 2024 (Utizberea et al. 2024; IOTC 2024c) estimated that the spawning biomass of YFT in the Indian Ocean was 32% above the level producing MSY, while fishing mortality was estimated to be 75% of the level producing MSY. The catch in 2023 was 5% lower than the MSY value for the most recent 20 years. Therefore, the harvest strategy which has not been fully tested, but the evidence indicates that it is achieving its objectives and meets SG80 but does not meet SG100.</p>			

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PI 1.2.1		There is a robust and precautionary harvest strategy in place		
c	Harvest strategy monitoring			
	Guide post	Monitoring is in place that is expected to determine whether the harvest strategy is working.		
	Met?	Yes		
Rationale		Following Resolution 15/02, contracting Parties and Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties (CPCs) provide prescribed information to the IOTC Secretariat. The collection of scientific data is done by observers (Resolution 24/04), who monitor at least 5% of the number of operations/sets for each gear type by the fleet of each CPC while fishing in the IOTC area of competence of 24 meters overall length and over. Regular stock assessments are performed and therefore monitoring is in place that is expected to determine whether the harvest strategy is working, hence SG60 is met .		
d	Harvest strategy review			
	Guide post			The harvest strategy is periodically reviewed and improved as necessary.
	Met?			Yes
Rationale		<p>The SId only contains a single requirement at the SG100 level, the harvest strategy is periodically reviewed and improved as necessary.</p> <p>There has not been a comprehensive structured review of the performance of the entire management system. However, the IOTC's Working Party on Tropical Tunas (WPTT) and the Scientific Committee regularly discuss individual components of the strategy such as stock assessments, management measures, and the scientific information that is regularly collected and available to conduct assessments and make decisions. An example of these discussions and how they lead to improvements is found in the yellowfin tuna section of the report of 26th session of the WPTT (IOTC 2024c). The team considered that although not necessarily a formal review process, these discussions do represent relevant revisions of the different elements of their harvest strategy and that they take place periodically, meeting the requirements at the SG100 level.</p>		
e	Shark finning			
	Guide post	It is likely that shark finning is not taking place.	It is highly likely that shark finning is not taking place.	There is a high degree of certainty that shark finning is not taking place.
	Met?	NA	NA	NA
Rationale		Scoring Issue need not be scored if sharks are not a target species.		
f	Review of alternative measures			
	Guide post	There has been a review of the potential effectiveness and practicality of alternative measures to minimise UoA-related mortality of unwanted catch of the target stock.	There is a regular review of the potential effectiveness and practicality of alternative measures to minimise UoA-related mortality of unwanted catch of the target stock and	There is a biennial review of the potential effectiveness and practicality of alternative measures to minimise UoA-related mortality of unwanted catch of the target stock, and
	Met?			

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PI 1.2.1	There is a robust and precautionary harvest strategy in place																																					
		they are implemented as appropriate.	they are implemented, as appropriate.																																			
Met?	N/A	N/A	N/A																																			
Rationale	<p>Resolution 24/06 (replacing Resolution 19/05) states that Contracting Parties and Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties shall require all purse seine vessels to retain on board and then land all bigeye tuna, skipjack tuna, and yellowfin tuna caught, except fish considered unfit for human consumption or any that are not retained on the final fishing operation of a trip (where the Captain and crew attempt to release the tuna alive as soon as possible and no further fishing is undertaken on that trip).</p> <p>In this regard, it is noted that AGAC vessels are monitored 100% with human and/or EM observer coverage. Data for AGAC vessels on IO YFT discards for 2019-2023 were supplied to the assessment team by AZTI via the client following the site visit (Table 1.2.1.f, below). These data show that, on average, AGAC vessels discarded just less than 0.5% of the IO YFT catch. These values are considered negligible as a proportion of the total catch and in terms of their regularity. As such, this SI is not scored.</p> <p>Table 1.2.1.f: Observed retained versus discarded catch of IO YFT by AGAC vessels.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Yellowfin Tuna IO – Observed MT</th> <th>2019</th> <th>2020</th> <th>2021</th> <th>2022</th> <th>2023</th> <th>TOTAL</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Discarded-Fish damaged/unfit</td> <td>63</td> <td>3</td> <td>0</td> <td>2</td> <td>51</td> <td>119</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Discarded-Wells Full</td> <td>5</td> <td>0</td> <td>5</td> <td>0</td> <td>25</td> <td>35</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Retained</td> <td>7879</td> <td>2845</td> <td>5858</td> <td>7494</td> <td>7705</td> <td>31781</td> </tr> <tr> <td>%Discarded</td> <td>0.86</td> <td>0.10</td> <td>0.09</td> <td>0.03</td> <td>0.97</td> <td>0.48</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>			Yellowfin Tuna IO – Observed MT	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	TOTAL	Discarded-Fish damaged/unfit	63	3	0	2	51	119	Discarded-Wells Full	5	0	5	0	25	35	Retained	7879	2845	5858	7494	7705	31781	%Discarded	0.86	0.10	0.09	0.03	0.97	0.48
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%Discarded	0.86	0.10	0.09	0.03	0.97	0.48																																

Draft scoring range and information gap indicator included in Announcement Comment Draft Report stage only

Draft scoring range	≥80
Information gap indicator	Updated estimates of discards from the UoA are needed to finalise scoring of Slf.

Overall Performance Indicator scores added from Client and Peer Review Draft Report stage

Overall Performance Indicator score	95
Condition number (if relevant)	N/A

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PI 1.2.2 – Harvest control rules and tools

PI 1.2.2		There are well-defined and effective harvest control rules (HCRs) in place			
Scoring issue	SG 60	SG 80	SG 100		
a	HCRs design and application				
	Guide post	Generally understood HCRs are in place or available that are expected to reduce the exploitation rate as the point of recruitment impairment (PRI) is approached.	Well defined HCRs are in place that ensure that the exploitation rate is reduced as the PRI is approached, are expected to keep the stock fluctuating around a target level consistent with (or above) MSY, or for key LTL species a level consistent with ecosystem needs.	The HCRs are expected to keep the stock fluctuating at or above a target level consistent with MSY, or another more appropriate level taking into account the ecological role of the stock, most of the time.	
	Met?	Yes	No	No	
Rationale	<p>The MSC Vocabulary and the Guidance to the Fisheries Standard define HCRs as a set of well-defined, pre-agreed rules and management actions taken in response to changes in indicators of stock status with respect to explicit or implicit reference points. It follows that Scoring Issue (a) requires at the SG80 level that well defined harvest control rules need to be in place, ensuring that the exploitation rate is reduced as the PRI is approached. Additionally, it is expected that the rule will keep the stock fluctuating around or above a level consistent with MSY. At the SG100 level, it is expected that the stock will be maintained at or above this level most of the time, as per SA2.5.4, meaning that, “where simulation testing is available”, the stock is maintained at or above MSY at least 70% of the time.</p> <p>According to the Guidance to the Standard in GSA2.5, the purpose of this SI is to assess the ability of the HCR and tools to “<i>control exploitation of the whole stock(s) under assessment</i>”. While the Standard Guidance and Vocabulary provide clear definitions that to meet the SG80 requirement of ‘well-defined’, an HCR has to exist in some written form and be agreed by the management agency, the meaning of “in place” is not so clearly defined in MSC documentation. In the absence of a separate SI that requires ‘implementation’, for this SI the team has taken the Guidance purpose expressed above to mean that for an HCR to be in place there should be evidence available to demonstrate that procedures exist and require the fishers to comply with management decisions to control effort when reductions in harvest rates are necessary to prevent the stock reaching the PRI.</p> <p>i) The Harvest Control Rule is well defined.</p> <p>Resolution 15/10 presented a set of rules that define actions depending on stock status relative to reference points. The statements in the rules aim to respond to the status assessed with the purpose of maintaining abundance and fishing pressure within the boundaries defined by the reference points. According to the definitions in the preceding paragraph, the harvest control rules as presented in Resolution 15/10 are considered a set of pre-agreed rules that allow the fishery to respond to changes perceived in stock assessments and define actions to be taken if the reference points are exceeded, and in general to maintain or restore abundance at the level producing MSY or above. Nevertheless, the reference points are presented as a function of B_0 instead of B_{MSY} after consideration that MSY-based reference points “cannot be robustly estimated”, the proposed reference points were expected to be revised in 2018 but the team did not received information about that revision, therefore they remain interim. By implication, the main elements of the HCR are preliminary in nature, and although considered precautionary, are still a basic set of procedures</p>				

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		<p>that have been active without revision since 2015. These procedures are presented as guidelines with general responses to stock status as presented in Kobe plots (see background section on HCR). The HCR is therefore considered to be generally understood but not “well-defined” yet.</p> <p>ii) The Harvest Control Rule is in place.</p> <p>In most cases, Resolutions are adopted by all CPCs, but on occasion, some countries do object a Resolution (e.g. Resolution 21/01 on an interim rebuilding plan), although a previous version may remain binding for the objectors. At the regional level, the HCR, it is noted that some Resolutions (e.g. 17/02 on the implementation of management measures; 18/01, 19/01 and 21/01 on the implementation of a rebuilding plan for YFT) can be considered accessory tools to Resolution 15/10 to implement actions supporting the HCR and the use of the proposed reference points.</p> <p>It is also noted that the IOTC has made several attempts to control the fishing pressure to restore abundance according to the rebuilding plan, and although not always has succeeded, the results of the latest stock assessment indicate that catches were controlled and limited to be under MSY to the point where the data and results of the modelling analyses suggest that the stock is recovering.</p> <p>iii) The HCR reduces exploitation rate as the PRI is approached.</p> <p>The results of the 2024 assessment are encouraging to demonstrate that the HCR is effectively capable of reducing the exploitation rate as the PRI is approached and can be expected to keep the stock fluctuating around a level consistent with MSY or above. However, previous years have shown evidence that overfishing was happening and the stock appeared to continue declining. The team recognizes that the situation is more optimistic at the time of conducting the MSC assessment but decided to act with caution and wait for future results to demonstrate that effectively the HCR is working as expected.</p> <p>Conclusion In summary, the team considered that there is a <i>Generally Understood</i> HCR in place that can be <i>expected</i> to reduce the exploitation rate as the point of recruitment is approached and the fishery meets the requirements for harvest control rules at SG60.</p> <p>The team also considered that given the recent history of difficulties in controlling fishing pressure, that only recently the evidence may indicate that the HCR is being effectively operational, the interim nature of the HCR and reference points that are proxies proposed nine years ago, the fishery does not meet the requirements at SG80. A new Condition of Certification (#9) is set here (as for SIb and SIc).</p>	
b	The robustness of HCRs to uncertainty		
	Guide post		<p>The HCRs are likely to be robust to the main uncertainties.</p> <p>The HCRs take account of a wide range of uncertainties including the ecological role of the stock, and there is evidence that the HCRs are robust to the main uncertainties.</p>
	Met?	No	No
Rationale		<p>The main uncertainties that could undermine the effectiveness of the HCR are associated to the stock assessment. While the latest assessment has addressed some of the issues that were identified in the independent review of 2023, these uncertainties remain, and it will likely take more time to reduce the impact on the performance of the HCR. The review suggested further work on remaining uncertainties, including the estimates of natural mortality, validation of growth parameters, developing a model to investigate the role of spatial structure and improving longline</p>	

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	<p>CPUEs. While no formal testing has been conducted to determine the level of performance of the HCR, it is considered likely that it would be robust to these uncertainties.</p> <p>Another important uncertainty is associated with the actual level of acceptance of the rule. In this regard, the MSC Guidance to the Fisheries Certification Requirements (GSA2.5.2-2.5.5 in relation to Scoring Issue b – Scoring uncertainty in the HCRs) requires assessment teams to consider cases where an HCR “has not been fully agreed by stakeholders, and it is uncertain whether the fishing community will comply with the HCR. This last issue is important to ensure HCRs are not only theoretical rules on paper, but are actually applied in practice”. The assessment team determined that this is a main uncertainty for IO YFT given that some CPCs have not adopted relevant Resolutions that are intended to control fishing pressure and ensure that management objectives can be met. In this regard, the assessment team is not satisfied that there is evidence that the HCRs are applied in practice, and the fishery does not meet SG80. A new Condition of Certification (#9) is set here (as for Sla and Slc).</p>			
c	Evaluation of HCRs			
	Guide post	There is some evidence that tools used or available to implement HCRs are appropriate and effective in controlling exploitation.	Available evidence indicates that the tools in use are appropriate and effective in achieving the exploitation levels required under the HCRs.	Evidence clearly shows that the tools in use are effective in achieving the exploitation levels required under the HCRs.
	Met?	Yes	No	No
Rationale	<p>Under SA2.5.5, in order to conclude that ‘available’ HCRs are ‘effective’ (SG60), MSC requires evidence of i) the use of effective HCRs in other stocks or fisheries under the same management body; or ii) a formal agreement or framework with trigger levels which will require the development of a well-defined HCR. Applicable to this fishery, teams are also required to consider current exploitation rates in relation to biological reference points and the agreed trigger level (guidance for SA2.5.6: ‘evidence that current F is equal to or less than F_{MSY} should usually be taken as evidence that the HCR is effective’). The overall effect of resolutions 12/01, 15/10, 19/01 and 21/01 is to provide interim elements of the harvest strategy that are intended to ensure that the stock is maintained around the target reference points (B_{MSY} and F_{MSY}), implying the intention of resolutions 12/01, 15/10 and 19/01 is to be consistent with appropriate management. Resolution 15/10 (IOTC 2015a) has set interim target (B_{MSY} and F_{MSY}) and limit ($B_{LIM} = 0.40 B_{MSY}$ and $F_{LIM} = 1.40 F_{MSY}$) reference points for YFT and 19/01 and 21/01 (IOTC, 2024d) determine the cuts of catches of the 2014 (or other alternative time-period, where applicable) reference catch level. Theoretically the harvest control rule is appropriate and effective in controlling exploitation. The results of the 2024 assessment are encouraging in presenting some evidence that the tools are effective in controlling exploitation, but currently not clearly at levels required under the HCRs, therefore SG60 is met, but not SG80. A new Condition of Certification (#9) is set here (as for Sla and Slb).</p>			

Draft scoring range and information gap indicator included in Announcement Comment Draft Report stage only

Draft scoring range	60-79
Information gap indicator	Information sufficient to score PI.

Overall Performance Indicator scores added from Client and Peer Review Draft Report stage

Overall Performance Indicator score	60
Condition number (if relevant)	#9

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PI 1.2.3 – Information and monitoring

PI 1.2.3		Relevant information is collected to support the harvest strategy		
Scoring issue	SG 60	SG 80	SG 100	
a	Range of information			
	Guide post	Some relevant information related to stock structure, stock productivity, and fleet composition is available to support the harvest strategy.	Sufficient relevant information related to stock structure, stock productivity, fleet composition, and other data are available to support the harvest strategy.	A comprehensive range of information (on stock structure, stock productivity, fleet composition, stock abundance, UoA removals, and other information such as environmental information), including some that may not be directly related to the current harvest strategy, is available.
	Met?	Yes	Yes	No
Rationale	<p>In accordance with the provisions of Article IX, paragraph 1 of the IOTC Agreement:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Each flag CPC shall ensure that all purse seine, longline, gillnet, pole and line, handline and trolling fishing vessels flying its flag and authorised to fish species managed by IOTC be subject to a data recording system.</i> <i>The measure shall apply to all purse seine, longline, gillnet, pole and line, handline and trolling fishing vessels over 24 metres length overall and those under 24 metres if they fish outside the EEZs of their flag States within the IOTC area of competence.</i> <i>All vessels shall keep a bound paper or electronic logbook to record data that includes operational, catch and effort information.</i> <i>The Flag State shall provide all the data for any given year to the IOTC Secretariat by June 30th of the following year on an aggregated basis.</i> <p>Following Resolution 15/01 (IOTC 2015c) there is a call upon States, either individually, collectively or through regional fisheries management organisations and arrangements included in the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 67/79 on sustainable fisheries to collect the necessary data in order to evaluate and closely monitor the use of large-scale fish aggregating devices and others, as appropriate, and their effects on tuna resources and tuna behaviour and associated and dependent species, to improve management procedures to monitor the number, type and use of such devices to mitigate possible negative effects on the ecosystem, including on juveniles and the incidental bycatch of non-target species, particularly sharks and turtles.</p> <p>Additionally, Resolution 15/02 Contracting Parties and Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties (CPCs) shall provide the following information to the IOTC Secretariat:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Total catch data: Estimates of the total catch by species and gear, if possible quarterly, that shall be submitted annually (separated, whenever possible, by retained catches in live weight and by discards in live weight or numbers) for all species under the IOTC mandate as well as the most commonly caught elasmobranch species according to records of catches and incidents as established in Resolution 15/01 on the recording of catch and effort data by fishing vessels in the IOTC area of competence</i> <i>Concerning cetaceans, seabirds and marine turtles, data should be provided.</i> 			

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	<p>3. <i>Catch and effort data: for example, for surface fisheries: catch weight by species and fishing effort shall be provided by 1° grid area and month strata. Purse seine and pole and line fisheries data shall be stratified by fishing mode (e.g. free-swimming schools or schools in association with floating objects). The data shall be extrapolated to the total national monthly catches for each gear. Documents describing the extrapolation procedures (including raising factors corresponding to the logbook coverage) shall also be submitted routinely. Effort units reported should be consistent with those effort requirements of Resolution 15/01 (or any subsequent superseding revision).</i></p> <p>Another source of biological information is the Regional Observer Scheme database, that collates data – including size and weight measurement – recorded by scientific observers and reported to the IOTC Secretariat (in detailed form) as part of the ROS data exchange workflow.</p> <p>Sufficient relevant information related to stock structure, stock productivity, fleet composition and other data are available to support the harvest strategy. For more detailed data availability see P1.2.3c. SG60 and SG80 are met.</p> <p>A range of environmental indices are configured to characterise seasonal and temporal variation in the oceanographic conditions in the Indian Ocean. These indices are primarily defined to investigate the potential for environmental covariates to be incorporated in the estimation of the movement of fish between adjacent model regions. However, noting the uncertainty associated with data quality (IOTC 2018, Martin 2023) (e.g., spatial representativeness of CPUE coverage, difficulties in the estimation of total catch and inconsistencies in length-frequency data) SG 100 is not met</p>			
b	Monitoring			
	Guide post	Stock abundance and UoA removals are monitored and at least one indicator is available and monitored with sufficient frequency to support the harvest control rule.	Stock abundance and UoA removals are regularly monitored at a level of accuracy and coverage consistent with the harvest control rule , and one or more indicators are available and monitored with sufficient frequency to support the harvest control rule.	All information required by the harvest control rule is monitored with high frequency and a high degree of certainty, and there is a good understanding of inherent uncertainties in the information [data] and the robustness of assessment and management to this uncertainty.
	Met?	Yes	Yes	No
Rationale		<p>Large amounts of data are collected and used by the IOTC Secretariat to provide a best scientific estimate of catch. All CPCs must report landings at designated ports, and it is the responsibility of flag-states to submit these data to the IOTC. Like most RFMOs, data are handled in digital format and catches are reported electronically, and for OPAGAC, are linked to AIS / VMS – AZTI for processing.</p> <p>Each IOTC dataset (nominal catch, catch and effort, and size data) are assessed against IOTC standards and are assigned quality grades according to the following table (Reproduced from IOTC 2024a)</p>		

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Data set	Criterion	By species	By gear
Retained catch	Fully available	0	0
	Partially available	2	2
	Fully estimated	4	4
Catch and effort	Available according to standards	0	0
	Not available according to standards	2	2
	Low coverage (<30% logbooks)	2	
	Not available	8	
Size frequency	Available according to standards	0	0
	Not available according to standards	2	2
	Low coverage (<1 fish per tonne caught)	2	
	Not available	8	

The proportion of catches estimated, or adjusted, by the IOTC Secretariat is relatively low (Figure 1.2.3.b.1, using quality scores as provided in the table above). Catches are less certain for many coastal fisheries, notably those from Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Yemen, and Madagascar; the gillnet fishery of Pakistan; Non-reporting industrial purse seiners and longliners (NEI), and longliners of India.

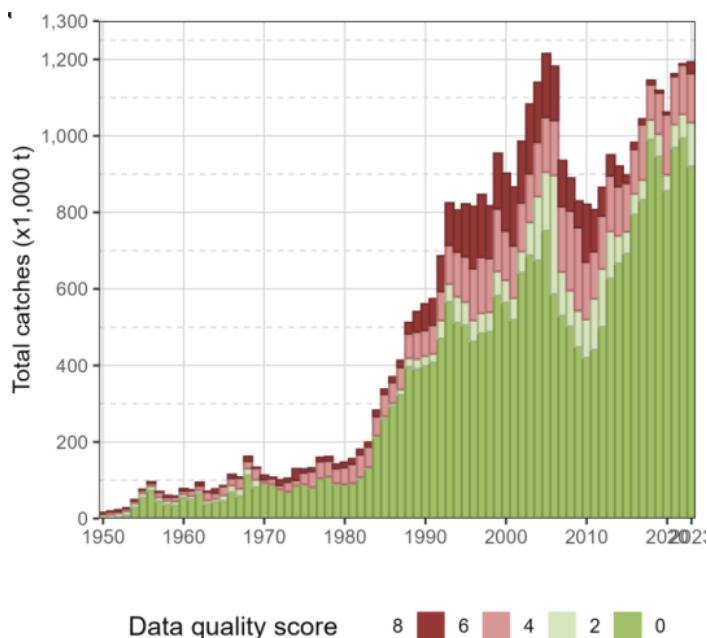


Figure 1.2.3.b.1. Annual retained catch of tropical tunas in the Indian Ocean by data quality as scored by the IOTC (from IOTC 2024a).

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Catch data are considered to be generally well known for the major industrial fisheries, but quality of the data from the artisanal fisheries was not very good until about 2010. Overall, compared to other species groups, retained catch data for tropical tuna are well reported. With over 49% of the tropical catches are from industrial fisheries, which are well monitored through logbooks and recording systems, there is minimal uncertainty regarding industrial retained catches. In contrast, the percentage of fully or partially reported catches from coastal fisheries decreased to 61% in 2023, down from 69% in 2022 (IOTC 2024a). This recent figure is likely to improve with the submission of additional data (see Figure 1.2.3.b.2).



Figure 1.2.3.b.2. Percent of retained catch fully or partially reported to the IOTC Secretariat by type of fishery (from IOTC 2024a).

In addition, as much as 30% of the total tunas tagged by the Indian Ocean Tuna Tagging Programme (IOTTP) are yellowfin

Stock abundance and UoA removals are regularly monitored at a level of accuracy and coverage consistent with the harvest control rule, and one or more indicators are available and monitored with sufficient frequency to support the harvest control rule, therefore **SG60 and SG80 are met**.

Although all information required by the harvest control rule is monitored with high frequency, for a number of fisheries a certain level of catch of tropical tuna and catch-and-effort remains either unavailable, incomplete (e.g., missing catches by species or gear), or only partially reported according to the standards of IOTC Resolution 15/02, or done at a higher degree of uncertainty. There is also low understanding of inherent uncertainties in the information [data] and the robustness of assessment and management to this uncertainty, therefore **SG100 is not met**.

c	Comprehensiveness of information		
	Guide post		There is good information on all other fishery removals from the stock.
	Met?		Yes

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Rationale	<p>Catch and effort data series are available for the major industrial and artisanal fisheries. For other important fisheries catch-and-effort are either not available, or are considered to be of poor quality for the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - data for the fresh-tuna longline fishery of Taiwan, China are only available since 2006 and partial data for the fresh-tuna longline fishery of Indonesia is available only for 2018; - insufficient data for the gillnet fisheries of I.R., Iran (before 2007) and Pakistan; - poor quality effort data for the significant gillnet-longline fishery of Sri Lanka (until 2014); - no data are available from important coastal fisheries using hand and/or troll lines, in particular Oman, Yemen, Madagascar and Indonesia (until 2018). <p>Despite these shortfalls the quality of the data can be considered good at least in the last 10 years.</p> <p>Catch-at-Size (Age) data are available, although the estimates are more uncertain in some years and some fisheries due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - size data not being available from important fisheries, notably Yemen, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Indonesia (lines and gillnets) and Comoros and Madagascar (lines). Data from the artisanal fisheries of Oman (mainly handlines) is known to be available for some years (until 2016) but has not been officially submitted to the IOTC Secretariat. - the paucity of size data available from industrial longliners from the late-1960s up to the mid-1980s, and in recent years (Japan and Taiwan, China) - the paucity of catch by area data available for some industrial fleets (NEI fleets, I.R. Iran, India, Indonesia, Malaysia). <p>Catch data are considered to be generally well known for the major industrial fisheries, with the proportion of catches estimated, or adjusted, by the IOTC Secretariat relatively low. There is currently considered to be good information on all other fishery removals from the stock, SG80 is met.</p>
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Draft scoring range and information gap indicator included in Announcement Comment Draft Report stage only

Draft scoring range	≥80
Information gap indicator	Information sufficient to score PI

Overall Performance Indicator scores added from Client and Peer Review Draft Report stage

Overall Performance Indicator score	80
Condition number (if relevant)	N/A

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PI 1.2.4 – Assessment of stock status

PI 1.2.4		There is an assessment of the stock status		
Scoring issue		SG 60	SG 80	SG 100
a	Appropriateness of assessment to stock under consideration			
	Guide post		The assessment is appropriate for the stock and for the harvest control rule.	The assessment takes into account the major features relevant to the biology of the species and the nature of the UoA.
	Met?		Yes	Yes
Rationale		<p>The integrated Stock Synthesis III statistical catch at age stock assessment methodology is well developed (Methot & Wetzel 2013) and was used by the IOTC to assess the yellowfin tuna stock status in 2024. This assessment provides results of stock status relative to the pre-agreed reference points. The 2024 assessment is the latest iteration of assessments that have been conducted and represents an improvement from previous iterations. Particular care has been applied to data quality producing new CPUE abundance indices from the main longline fleets from 1975-2023 which significantly informed the assessment model. The new index differed from the one used in the 2021 assessment particularly in the northwestern region from 2005 to 2015 and 2019 and 2020. The longline index also shows an increase in abundance from 2021 to 2023 (Figure 9). CPUE from the EU purse-seine fleet fishing on free schools of fish were included in a subset of models, and indices based on the associative and non-associative dynamics of yellowfin tuna were also considered and their usefulness evaluated. Tag release and recovery data provided information on abundance, movements and mortality rates. Alternative assumptions regarding changes in the efficiency of the longline fleet were included to account for effort creep. Parameters of growth and natural mortality were revised.</p> <p>The stock assessment estimates status relative to reference points reflected in the harvest control rule, therefore it is considered to be appropriate for the stock and the control rule. It also takes into account the main features of the biology of the species and the nature of the UoA, therefore meets the requirements at both SG80 and SG100.</p>		
b	Assessment approach			
	Guide post	The assessment estimates stock status relative to generic reference points appropriate to the species category.	The assessment estimates stock status relative to reference points that are appropriate to the stock and can be estimated.	
	Met?	Yes	Yes	
Rationale		<p>Resolution 15/10 indicates that where possible, the IOTC Scientific Committee should apply MSY-based target and limit reference points and in particular, the interim target (B_{MSY} and F_{MSY}) and limit ($B_{LIM} = 0.40 B_{MSY}$ and $F_{LIM} = 1.40 F_{MSY}$) reference points. In case the Scientific Committee cannot provide MSY-based reference points, limit reference points are to be defined relative to B_0, specifically, the interim B_{LIM} will be set at $0.2 B_0$ and the fishing mortality rate limit reference point at $F_{0.2 B_0}$. Both biomass and fishing mortality target reference points have been estimated and the limit reference point is assumed as a fraction of the MSY levels, and although the fraction for biomass is lower than the MSC default, the team considers it still is appropriate for the stock. The fishery meets the requirements at SG60 and SG80.</p>		

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c	Uncertainty in the assessment			
	Guide post	The assessment identifies major sources of uncertainty.	The assessment takes uncertainty into account.	The assessment takes into account uncertainty and is evaluating stock status relative to reference points in a probabilistic way .
	Met?	Yes	Yes	No
Rationale		<p>A structural uncertainty grid was used to describe the main sources of uncertainty and included variations in the level of effort creep in the longline CPUE indices, weights assigned to tagging data and alternative values for the recruitment steepness parameter. Additionally, several diagnostics were conducted to identify potential misspecifications in selected reference models. The fishery meets the requirements at SG60 and SG80.</p> <p>Several uncertainties still need to be resolved and notwithstanding that the assessment has been tested with alternative hypotheses and different assessment approaches have been explored, the results have not shown to be robust, reference points have been interim since 2015 and have not been specified as formally adopted, statements about stock status relative to reference points are generic with definitions such as “maintain the stock with a high probability” for stocks in the green quadrant of a Kobe plot, but these probabilities have to be determined so that a predefined value unambiguously represents a “high probability”, additionally, Kolody and Jumppanen (2016) mentioned the following: “<i>The demonstration MPs can probably be improved with more careful consideration of the management objectives (e.g. currently there are conflicting objectives put forth by the Commission - BMSY is a target reference point, while a high probability of remaining above BMSY is considered desirable)</i>”. Therefore, the fishery does not meet SG100.</p>		
d	Evaluation of assessment			
	Guide post			The assessment has been tested and shown to be robust. Alternative hypotheses and assessment approaches have been rigorously explored.
	Met?			No
Rationale		<p>The latest stock assessment addresses uncertainties in relation to several assumptions and has now run diagnostics that could not be conducted in past iterations. There is a basic approach to handling uncertainty which is explicitly included in the evaluation of stock status and formulation of management advice (see IOTC 2024c). The 2024 assessment is the results of improvements that were incorporated following a peer review of the previous assessment and has improved in data quality and performance, however it has not been properly tested for robustness, therefore SG100 level is not met.</p>		
e	Peer review of assessment			
	Guide post		The assessment of stock status is subject to peer review.	The assessment has been internally and externally peer reviewed.
	Met?		Yes	Yes
Rationale		<p>Internal review of stock assessments is conducted by the Scientific Committee each year. IOTC reports show extensive discussion on model inputs, output uncertainties, stock structure and data</p>		

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	gaps. The 2024 assessment has not been subject to external peer review but it is the result of incorporating observations and comments from the peer review process after the previous assessment in 2021 (IOTC 2023). The fishery meets SG80 and SG100 .
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Draft scoring range and information gap indicator included in Announcement Comment Draft Report stage only

Draft scoring range	≥80
Information gap indicator	Information is sufficient to score PI.

Overall Performance Indicator scores added from Client and Peer Review Draft Report stage

Overall Performance Indicator score	90
Condition number (if relevant)	N/A

7.3. Principle 2 and Principle 3

As noted in the gap analysis (Section 3.3), Principle 2 and Principle 3 are not scored due to there being no change in scope compared to the original assessment of the AGAC IO Fishery when the IO SKJ (UoA 6) was certified (Akroyd et al. 2022). As such, Principle 2 and Principle 3 rationales and scoring are adopted for this scope extension process.

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8. Appendices

8.1. Assessment information

8.1.1. Previous assessments

This scope extension comprises a reassessment of the IO yellowfin tuna after it was assessed as a UoA in the original assessment of the AGAC IO fishery, completed in July 2022 (Akroyd et al 2022⁷). At that time, only skipjack tuna (UoA 6) was assessed as meeting the MSC Standard. Full details of the original assessment process are available on the MSC webpage for the fishery (<https://fisheries.msc.org/en/fisheries/agac-four-oceans-integral-purse-seine-tropical-tuna-fishery/@@view>).

8.2. Evaluation processes and techniques

8.2.1. Site visits

The assessment was announced on the MSC website and stakeholders that were identified by the client and also by LRQA, using stakeholder list from other MSC assessments within the region, were contacted directly by LRQA.

The site visit for the IO yellowfin tuna scope extension assessment took place remotely during the week commencing January 27th 2025. The assessment team prepared an audit itinerary prior to the site visit. No stakeholders requested to meet with the assessment team, and a meeting was sought only with the client to confirm the team’s understanding of the current status of the fishery (Table 18).

Table 18: Site visit meetings

Date	Name	Affiliation	Topics discussed
29 th January 2023	Rob Blyth-Skyrme Carlos Alvarez Megan McLaughlin Julio Moron Miguel Herrera	LRQA LRQA LRQA AGAC AGAC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The AGAC fishery in the IO • The IO YFT stock assessment process. • Harvest strategy and harvest control rule development process and timeline • IOTC meetings and processes, including the IO YFT data preparatory meeting, WPTT meeting and SC meeting. • Conditions and harmonisation • Stakeholder input

8.2.2. Stakeholder participation

A total of 163 stakeholder organisations and individuals having relevant interest in the assessment were identified and notified, via e-mail, of the surveillance process. This highlighted the potential process for engagement in the surveillance, if desired. In addition, the interest of others not appearing on this list was solicited through the postings on the MSC website.

The International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF) and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) submitted comments to the assessment team prior to the site visit (See Section 0, below).

⁷<https://cert.msc.org/FileLoader/FileLinkDownload.aspx/GetFile?encryptedKey=smivcVk6EHOIkDaY7Rr+TFfy0H704BWGjUeSgo9Fj0EJM1/rx1luwCtAW2gSmlj/>

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8.2.3. Evaluation techniques

Public Announcements

The scope extension was announced publicly on the 20th December 2024 at the MSC website as well as sent by email in the MSC Fishery Announcements newsletter to all registered recipients. The announcement was also distributed to all LRQA stakeholders via the LRQA Mailchimp system. This was also the method used for consultation on subsequent steps (e.g., peer reviewer announcement, new UoA, etc.). At this time, LRQA also announced the assessment site visit dates and location, as well as the assessment team. This was done according to the process requirements in MSC's Fisheries Certification Process v2.3, and in the MSC Fisheries Standard v.2.01. Together, these media presented the announcement to a wide audience representing industry, agencies, and other stakeholders. Meetings and conference calls held during the site visit constituted the main tool in guaranteeing the participation of relevant stakeholders.

Information gathering

The assessment team reviewed documents sent by the client ahead of the site visit (catch data, logbooks, IOTC resolutions and science outputs and other scientific publications). See Section 8.11 for a detailed list of references used. Any additional documentation will be considered as appropriate.

Scoring

Scoring was performed according to the procedure established in Certification Requirement 7.10 (MSC FCR v2.01). It is noted that scoring for this yellowfin tuna scope extension of the AGAC IO Fishery is limited to Principle 1, only (see Gap Analysis, Section 3.3). In the Fisheries Standard v2.01 default assessment tree used for this assessment, the MSC has 28 PIs, only six of which are in Principle 1.

Each PI consists of one or more 'scoring issues;' a scoring issue is a specific topic for evaluation. 'Scoring Guideposts' define the requirements for meeting each scoring issue at the 60 (conditional pass), 80 (full pass), and 100 (state of the art) levels.

Note that some scoring issue may not have a scoring guidepost at each of the 60, 80, and 100 levels; in the case of PI 1.1.1, scoring issue (b) does not have a scoring issue at the SG60 level. The scoring issues and scoring guideposts are cumulative; this means that a PI is scored first at the SG60 levels. If not all of the SG scoring issues meet the 60 requirements, the fishery fails, and no further scoring occurs. If all of the SG60 scoring issues are met, the fishery meets the 60 level, and the scoring moves to SG80 scoring issues. If no scoring issues meet the requirements at the SG80 level, the fishery receives a score of 60. As the fishery meets increasing numbers of SG80 scoring issues, the score increases above 60 in proportion to the number of scoring issues met; PI scoring occurs at 5-point intervals. If the fishery meets half the scoring issues at the 80 level, the PI would score 70; if it meets a quarter, then it would score 65; and it would score 75 by meeting three-quarters of the scoring issues. If the fishery meets all of the SG80 scoring issues, the scoring moves to the SG100 level. Scoring at the SG100 level follows the same pattern as for SG80. Principle scores result from averaging the scores within each component, and then from averaging the component scores within each Principle. If a Principle averages less than 80, the fishery fails.

Scoring for this fishery followed a consensus process in which the assessment team members discussed the information available for evaluating PIs to develop a broad opinion of performance of the fishery against each PI. Review of the background sections by all team members assured that the assessment team was aware of the issues for each PI.

The assessment team held preliminary scoring meetings along the site visit where the Performance Indicators of the fishery were evaluated jointly by the team in order to assess whether there was still information needs to be

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communicated to the client. After the site visit, each team member was assigned their relevant section in the report to complete before proceeding to a joint evaluation of every PI and the pertaining scoring systems and rationales through scoring meetings which took place via conference calls. Team members are responsible for completely their relevant scoring tables and providing a provisional score. PI scores (Section 5.3) were entered into MSC’s Fishery Assessment Scoring Worksheet to arrive at Principle-level scores (Section 5.2).

It is determined that the IO yellowfin tuna scope extension of the AGAC IO Fishery complies with MSC Fisheries Certification Requirements v2.01.

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8.3. Peer Review reports

The following comments (Table 19 – Table 21) were received from the Peer Reviewer, with the CAB responses also now included.

Table 19: Peer review comments – General

Question	Yes/No	Peer Reviewer Justification (as given at initial Peer Review stage). Peer Reviewers should provide brief explanations for their 'Yes' or 'No' answers in this table, summarising the detailed comments made in the PI / RBF tables (first row) and conditions (second row).	CAB Response to Peer Reviewer's comments (as included in the Public Comment Draft Report - PCDR)
Is the scoring of the fishery consistent with the MSC standard, and clearly based on the evidence presented in the assessment report?	Yes	Note this scope extension only addressed YFT Principle 1. I agree with the scoring with a caveat for 1.2.2 where I believe further discussion could support or deflate the argument.	Thank you for the comment. We have addressed the point on PI 1.2.2 against that specific PI.
Are the condition(s) raised appropriately written to clearly identify relevant scoring issues and scoring elements and define any milestones, consistent with the MSC process requirements? [Reference: FCP v3.0 Section 7.16]	Yes	The Condition is clear and consistent with other 1.2.2 conditions.	Thank you, noted.

Table 20: Peer review comments – PIs (v.2.01)

PI	PR comment code	Peer Reviewer Justification (as given at initial Peer Review stage)	CAB Response to Peer Reviewer's comments (as included in the Public Comment Draft Report - PCDR)	CAB Response Code
1.1.1	No comments (scoring agreed)	Scoring Agreed	Thank you, noted.	NA (No response needed)
1.1.2	NA (PI not scored)		Thank you, noted.	NA (No response needed)
1.2.1	No comments (scoring agreed)	Scoring Agreed	Thank you, noted.	NA (No response needed)
1.2.2	Scoring implications unknown	"1.2.2.a SG 60 Generally understood HCRs are in place or available that are expected to reduce the exploitation rate as the point of	Thank you for this observation, it is indicative of the complexity of the management system in the IO and how the members of the IOTC work to implement it. The comment is	No change



recruitment impairment (PRI) is approached." "1.2.2.c SG 60 There is some evidence that tools used or available to implement HCRs are appropriate and effective in controlling exploitation"

This certification process is a scope extension addressing only Principle 1 aspects of yellowfin tuna. This implies that the P2 and P3 scoring determinations are not addressed; neither are the P1 conditions 1.2.2 on SKJ HCR (Open Conditions 1 and 2 SKJ 1.2.1 and 1.2.2.). However, there are several issues that make me question whether the IOTC's HCR is "generally understood" and that "tools ...are appropriate and effective..." .

The Report notes that (ACDR Table 17) that an implied TAC (from 21-01) for 2023 was 398,000t which is very close to the estimated catch. That's good. Prior year catches since 2018 were about 10% higher. But It is unclear to me whether 21-01 establish a hard TAC and when it went into effect. The most recent catch is on-target, but it is unclear how this was effectuated and whether it had anything to do with a general control rule. Additionally, open Condition 2 on the SKJ HCRs implies

introducing several aspects that we have attempted to disaggregate to make this complex situation easier to follow.

The HCR is "generally understood". To conclude that the harvest strategy has a generally understood and not a "well-defined" HCR, we observe that Resolution 15/10 presents explicit management objectives that are associated to the reference points. Limit and target reference points that are initially MSY-based are declared, later redefined in terms of Bo. Also, a set of "guidelines" are presented describing generic actions to be conducted as a response to perceived or estimated stock status as shown in Kobe plots. These guidelines were identified as the essential components of a HCR, which are adopted in the Resolution and therefore, even if not presented with details, are sufficiently clear to be considered as generally understood.

There is some evidence that tools used or available to implement HCRs are appropriate and effective in controlling exploitation. We agree with the reviewer in terms of the complexity or difficulty to approach the effectiveness of the tools in this fishery. However, we made the following considerations. First, we have to consider that this SI evaluates the effectiveness of the tool. The risk of incomplete implementation by all parties is then addressed in 1.2.2 SIb (robustness to uncertainty), where we included the rationale that a main uncertainty relates to the fact that the HCR has not been fully agreed by stakeholders leading to uncertainty that they will comply with the HCR (see GSA2.5.2-2.5.5 - subheading 'Scoring issue (b) - Scoring uncertainty in the HCRs'). This implies that even tools that are well known to be effective can lead to uncertain results. For this fishery, we observed legitimate efforts to improve the stock assessment which has been in development for some time and there is also evidence that the system is being constantly improved and attempting to resolve the many issues that it is facing. As a result of this, even if they struggle to have all members complying with the catch limits, fishing mortality has oscillated considerably since year 2000 and declining since 2018 approximately; biomass stopped declining around 2009 and appears to be increasing since 2018. We concluded that all this is sufficient evidence to accept that there is at least "some evidence that tools used or available to implement HCRs are appropriate and effective in controlling exploitation" as defined in the requirements and guidance.

21-01 establish a hard TAC and when it went into effect. In this regard, we observe a potential source for confusion where we read a long list of situations to determine catch limits to individual fleets of members of the Commission, so it is hard to relate these

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		<p>that the HCR for SKJ catch was being consistently overshot.</p> <p>To some extent this is being addressed by Open Condition 7 (3.2.2. Decision Making). The report would benefit from a discussion of the recent SKJ catches relative to HCRs and the harvest strategy. If the SKJ catches are in line with the HS/HCR then this is supportive of the “generally understood” and “effective tools” clauses. If they are not, then this is demonstration that those clauses have not been met for SKJ and casts doubt on whether they will be met for YFT. If this cannot be demonstrated then it is unlikely that SG60 is being met,</p>	<p>provisions to the total catch. In practice, these provisions are taken as additional measures that complement the determination of a total annual TAC so that catch allocation among members result in effective results relative to the total catch.</p> <p>The most recent catch is on-target, but it is unclear how this was effectuated and whether it had anything to do with a general control rule. As mentioned before, the application of the HCR has occurred with some members not abiding to the proposed catch limits, however, even with the uncertainty associated to this situation, the fishing mortality appears to be declining in the last four years or so, and biomass is estimated to be increasing. This should be considered as confirmation that although not implemented fully, it is achieving its objectives.</p> <p>The report would benefit from a discussion of the recent SKJ catches. It could, but under the current available evidence this is not necessary and we preferred not to use it.</p> <p>Overall, we are aware of the difficulties and problems in this fishery and how they reflect in their performance against the MSC requirements. We also consider that we have made a fair evaluation acknowledging where the fishery is performing according to the requirements and where it falls short to meet SG80 level in more than one SI. We also consider that the present evaluation appropriately covers the concerns of the PR.</p>	
1.2.3	No comments (scoring agreed)	Scoring Agreed	Thank you, noted.	NA (No response needed)
1.2.4	No comments (scoring agreed)	Scoring Agreed	Thank you, noted.	NA (No response needed)

Table 21: Peer review comments – Conditions

PI	Condition number	Condition code	Peer Reviewer Justification (as given at initial Peer Review stage)	CAB Response to Peer Reviewer's comments (as included in the PCDR)	CAB Response Code
1.2.2	9	Yes	The Condition is fully described and consistent with 1.2.2 Conditions on other IO tuna stocks. However, note my discussion under PI Comments on 1.2.2 about how the HCR SKJ progress can demonstrate (or deflate) the YFT HCR support.	Noted, thank you. We have addressed the comments on PI 1.2.2 against the specific PI.	No change made

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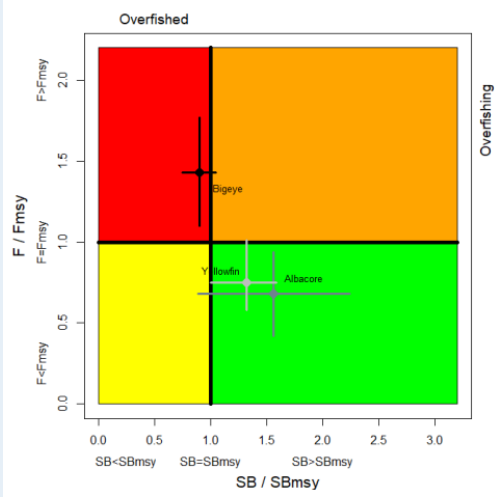
8.4. Stakeholder input

Input at the ACDR stage was received from the International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF) and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). The ISSF and WWF input together with the CAB's responses are provided, below. No additional comments were received during the site visit.

Table 22: ACDR stakeholder input – ISSF PI input ACDR and site visit v.2.01.

PI	Input summary	Input detail	Evidence or references	CAB response to stakeholder input	CAB response code
1.1.1 - Stock status (SI a)	According to the Medley (2024) independent report, scoring of PI 1.1.1.a for IO yellowfin tuna would not meet SG100.	<p>The stock assessment in 2021 fully updated previous assessments using an age structured model (SS3). Stock status is based on the SS3 model formulation. The stock status was overfished and subject to overfishing in 2020 where: B2020 = 87%BMSY (80%CI 63%-110%); F2020 = 132%FMSY (80%CI 68%-195%) and B2020 = 31%B0 (80%CI 24%-38%) (IOTC SC4 YFT-SS 2021).</p> <p>The most recent assessment indicates a worse status and higher uncertainty than the previous stock assessment in 2018 as shown by wider confidence intervals as well as the stock decreasing in size in recent years. The results show that there is a 90% probability that B2020 is greater than 63%BMSY, the default PRI being 20%B0=56%BMSY (GSA2.2.3.1). Allowing for adjustment of the lower confidence to match “high degree of certainty” (SA2.2.1.3: adjusting the lower 80%CI to match the 95% probability assuming the estimate is normally distributed=56%BMSY), the stock is not clearly above the PRI with a high degree of certainty. Therefore, the stock is highly likely above the PRI, meeting SG80, but not above the PRI with a high degree of certainty, and so SG100 is not met.</p>	Medley et al. (2024)	<p>Thank you for your comment. The Medley et al report was published in July 2024, whilst our assessment was based on the Report of the 26th Session of the IOTC Working Party on Tropical Tunas, available in November 2024, that presented the results of the 2024 stock assessment, and the Report of the 27th Session of the IOTC Scientific Committee which was available to us in January 2025. Hence, we are using results from an assessment newer than those in the Medley et al. (2024) report. It should be noted that the 2021 assessment report went through a review process and recommendations from that review were incorporated into the 2024 stock assessment.</p> <p>Resolution 15/10 indicates that where possible, the Scientific Committee should apply MSY-based target and limit reference points and in particular, the interim target (Bmsy and Fmsy) and limit (Blim = 0.40 Bmsy and Flim = 1.40 Fmsy) reference points. Noting that the selected Blim is lower than the 0.5Bmsy default value in the Guidance to the Requirements (GSA2.2.3.1; not 0.56Bmsy as mentioned in the comment). Results of the 2024 assessment indicate there is an 89%</p>	No change



				<p>probability that the stock is above the level producing MSY (see figure below).</p> 	
<p>1.1.1 Stock status (SI b)</p>	<p>According to the Medley (2024) independent report, scoring of PI</p>	<p>Relatively large catches have continued over the last few years. Catches in 2020 and 2021 were estimated as 430426t and 420807t respectively, a little under the average over the last 5 years of 434218t. This is still likely to have resulted in relatively large fishing mortality rates partly because the stock has fallen below BMSY.</p>	<p>Medley et al. (2024)</p>	<p>The results of the 2024 stock assessment are very different from those in the 2021 assessment. We refer the reader to Urtizbera et al. (2024). Stock assessment of yellowfin tuna in the Indian Ocean for 2024 (IOTC Document IOTC-2024-</p>	<p>No change</p>

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	<p>1.1.1.b for IO yellowfin tuna would not meet SG80.</p>	<p>With the stock estimated as below the BMSY in 2020, fishing mortality estimated as likely greater than FMSY in 2020 and no evidence of a reduction in catches in 2020 and 2021 (compared to 2017 levels), the stock is clearly not fluctuating around BMSY, but is in danger of declining further towards the PRI. Therefore, SG80 is not met.</p>		<p>WPTT26-11). As noted above, results of the 2024 assessment indicate there is an 89% probability that the stock is above the level producing MSY, meeting the SG80 requirement comfortably.</p>	
<p>1.1.2 - Stock rebuilding (SI a)</p>	<p>According to the Medley (2024) independent report, scoring of PI 1.1.2.a for IO yellowfin tuna would not meet SG60.</p>	<p>Assuming a natural mortality of 0.35 - 0.8 yr⁻¹, the yellowfin generation time should be around 3.75 – 5.9 years, and 2 generation times 8-12 years (GSA2.2.4: Goodyear 1995). This suggests that rebuilding needs to have been completed within 8-12 years from when the overfished state was detected, which would require rebuilding to be completed by 2026, 10 years after Res. 16/01.</p> <p>Catches have not decreased in the period 2016-2021 to the level required for rebuilding. Resolution 21/01 (updated from similar resolutions in 2017 and 2019) require reductions in 2022 catches based on 2014 (or other alternative time-period, where applicable) reference catch levels, which, if fully implemented, will achieve a reduction to around 400000t. Reductions need to be achieved by CPCs and vary by fleet from 0% to 21%. Bearing in mind at least a two-year delay before reductions occur and probably, based on the resolutions, a 10% reduction in practice will be achieved (i.e., 80% projected catches compared to current levels), there would be approximately >70% probability B2023<BMSY after 3 years and >50% probability B2030<BMSY after 10 years (Urtizbera et al. 2021). Also note some countries with significant yellowfin catches are not bound to this latest resolution and have agreed to abide to previous ones only.</p> <p>Although there is some doubt over rebuilding estimates due to problems with projections and other issues, there is little evidence that the stock will rebuild in practice with the current strategy. Therefore, it appears unlikely rebuilding will now be achieved within two generations, even if rebuilding was to be considered as starting in 2021, which does not meet SG60.</p>	<p>Medley et al. (2024)</p>	<p>This PI does not apply as stock is estimated to be above the PRI and above Bmsy.</p>	<p>No change</p>

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<p>1.1.2 Stock rebuilding (SI b)</p>	<p>According to the Medley (2024) independent report, scoring of PI 1.1.2.b for IO yellowfin tuna would not meet SG80.</p>	<p>Catch monitoring and stock assessments have taken place and are planned such that rebuilding can be fully evaluated. Some information was available in 2019-2021 relevant to evaluating the rebuilding resolutions. This meets SG60.</p> <p>Many, but not all, of the fisheries subject to catch reductions had achieved either a partial or full decrease in their catch during 2017-2021 relative to the reductions specified in resolutions 16/01, 17/01 and 19/01. However, total catches of yellowfin tuna have continuously increased from 2015 and in 2019 were the largest since 2010, as the catch decreases of these fisheries were offset by increases in the catches from gillnet and other coastal fisheries exempt from the limitations. This general problem has continued with lack of co-operation and agreement among CPCs. Some countries with significant yellowfin catches have not agreed to be bound to the latest resolution (Res. 21/01) and have agreed to abide to previous ones only. Further agreement on catch limits and other measures will be necessary to make the current rebuilding plan effective. Until catches and fishing mortality can be shown to have reduced to required levels, SG80 cannot be met.</p>	<p>Medley et al. (2024)</p>	<p>This PI does not apply as stock is estimated to be above the PRI and above Bmsy.</p>	<p>No change</p>
<p>1.2.1 Harvest strategy (SI a)</p>	<p>According to the Medley (2024) independent report, scoring of PI 1.2.1.a for IO yellowfin tuna would not meet SG80.</p>	<p>IOTC's objectives include the adoption, on the basis of scientific evidence, conservation and management measures to ensure the conservation of the stocks and to promote the objective of their optimum utilisation throughout the Indian Ocean. A "Compendium of Active Conservation and Management Measures for the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission" is maintained which sets out the resolutions currently active. Therefore, the harvest strategy objective is to maintain stock levels at or above the biomass which would produce MSY. This was established as an interim threshold reference point under Res. 15/10.</p> <p>IOTC has become concerned by the growing polarization shown in recent years among CPCs regarding some of the issues of great importance and that continuation of this worrying trend has been seriously undermining work of the Commission and that it is accelerating. The decision-making process is primarily dealt with in Principle 3, but the problems with reaching</p>	<p>Medley et al. (2024)</p>	<p>The team understands the concerns put forward in this comment; However this PI does not evaluate the performance of the Commission's mechanisms to produce advice or resolutions. Whether these dynamics interfere with the achievement of goals can only be assessed in this PI in terms of stock status relative to reference points in relation to management procedures established in the Commission's agreements or resolutions. On the basis of the evidence at hand, and strictly adhering to the requirements of this SI, at the end of the rationale of 1.2.1a we wrote:</p>	<p>No change</p>

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	<p>consensus are beginning to affect the harvest strategy particularly of skipjack and yellowfin, and may proceed to undermine these strategies if co-operation cannot be improved.</p> <p>Scientific advice has been formulated relative to a harvest strategy relative to MSY reference points and is responsive to that state of the stock and to limit and target reference points commonly used for yellowfin and other tropical tunas. This included two closed areas (UK IOT and Resolution 12/13 closed area 0°-10° N. and 40°-60° E. in November to purse seine, but was removed under Resolution 14/02) and a proposed 31 day closure across non-artisanal fisheries (Res. 23/03).</p> <p>Much of the strategy is untested and it is unclear whether the harvest strategy will be fully effective, particularly as a number of provisions, like well-defined catch limits, are still in development and have not been implemented yet.</p> <p>Catches have exceeded the estimated MSY since 2012. The 2021 estimate of MSY was 349000t (80%CI 286kt-412kt) while the average catch 2017-2021 = 434218t, suggesting that the current strategy is not working well.</p> <p>The scientific committee suggested in 2016 that the stock could recover to BMSY within 8 years (2024) with a 50% probability if catches were set at 80% of 2014 levels. Resolutions 16/01, 17/01, 18/01, 19/01 and 21/01 established interim plans for rebuilding the Indian Ocean yellowfin tuna stock in the IOTC area of competence, coming into force in years 2017-2022 respectively. The catch limits, if they had been successfully applied, would still have been higher than those recommended by the Scientific Committee to rebuild the stock, but could have plausibly recovered the stock within 10-12 years, which would have fulfilled the management objectives to attain BMSY. It is noticeable however, that the current strategy has so far not succeeded in reducing catches to the required level (see 1.2.2).</p> <p>Because this is expected to achieve MSY based management objectives perhaps in the longer term and actions have been partially successful, SG60 is met. However, it is not clear yet that elements of the harvest strategy are working together towards achieving management targets. For example,</p>	<p>"Because the estimated stock status in 2023 is consistent with the goal established in 2018 in Resolution 18/01, the harvest strategy can be considered to be responsive to the state of the stock and the evidence indicates that monitoring and stock assessments led to conservation and management decision leading to recover the stock to MSY based reference points, therefore, the elements of the harvest strategy are considered to work together towards achieving stock management objectives reflected in PI 1.1.1, SG80 is met. Because, in addition to the strategy being responsive to the state of the stock, it was designed to respond in a way to meet MSY based management objectives, the concluded that the fishery meets SG100".</p> <p>At this point, we do not have additional evidence that could lead to a different conclusion.</p>
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		fleets exempted from the rebuilding requirements seem to be increasing their catches, which is undermining the strategy, and no agreement has been reached on the control of drifting fish aggregation devices in 2021 due to problems with the Commission dispute mechanism. The decisions represented by the resolutions did not quite align with Scientific Committee advice, the rebuilding timeframe was not clearly defined, and it is not yet certain catch reductions will be achieved in a timely manner. In addition, several countries have not agreed to abide by the latest resolution (21/01) that aims to rebuild the stock, further undermining initiatives to reduce catches. It is worth noting that management strategy evaluation procedures are being developed which could lead to a more robust strategy, but this does not yet meet SG80.			
1.2.1 Harvest strategy (SI b)	According to the Medley (2024) independent report, scoring of PI 1.2.1.b for IO yellowfin tuna would not meet SG80.	The catch limits if enforced will likely result in stock recovery over the next 10 years. Some reduction in catch is highly likely, and, based on prior experience, it should be possible to reduce fishing mortality through the provisions to below FMSY. This meets SG60. What actual reduction will be achieved in practice remains in doubt, and whether this will be sufficient (or more than sufficient) is uncertain. A full stock assessment took place in 2021 and this did not provide evidence that the rebuilding plan was working yet, so SG80 has not been met.	Medley et al. (2024)	We again recognize the concerns in this comment by the stakeholder, however, we cannot evaluate performance based on doubts that a goal could be met. Moreover, if the concern is based on the results of the 2021 stock assessment, the situation has changed in the last four years, thus, in consistency with the argument provided, the evidence from the last four years indicates not only that methods to assess stock status are improving, but also that the estimated stock status has recovered after implementation of measures based on the 2018 goal in Resolution 18/01.	No change
1.2.1 Harvest strategy (SI f)	According to the Medley (2024) independent report, scoring of PI	Unwanted catch is defined by MSC as catch which is unwanted and not used (i.e., not sold or consumed). Under P1 it refers only to unwanted catch of the target species. A joint meeting of the tuna Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (tRFMOs) in Brisbane 2010 as part of the Kobe process, specifically focused on bycatch and discarding, although this mainly dealt with non-tuna species. Discards are routinely estimated for all target species	Medley et al. (2024)	Thank you for this comment. In your discussion, you suggest that this SI is to be scored meeting a level of SG80 but not SG100. However, this SI is only scored if there is "any non-negligible" proportion of the catch that is unwanted. Instead of	No change

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	<p>1.2.1.f for IO yellowfin tuna would not meet SG100.</p>	<p>where possible, but discarding of target tunas is not generally considered significant compared to other mortality and low compared to other fisheries (Gilman et al. 2020). However, whether discards are significant enough to require a review to work out how to reduce them will need to be determined on a case-by-case basis and monitoring depends upon the presence of at-sea observers.</p> <p>The main concern with discards of tuna appears to apply to the purse seine fleet. Discarding is clearly subject to review, and resolutions are proposed and discussed at meetings. A current resolution 19/05 has replaced 17/04 on this issue. This shows at the very least that discarding of tuna is discussed and reviewed regularly and that controls are being implemented, meeting SG80. It is not clear this review is biannual, so SG100 is not met.</p>		<p>"discards" the MSC Standard uses the term "unwanted catch" which "shall be interpreted by the team as the part of the catch that a fisher did not intend to catch but could not avoid, and did not want or chose not to use".</p> <p>At the time of the site visit, a thorough account of discard levels was not completed yet, however, data from 30 observed trips in 2023 include less than 1% of YFT discarded, which is considered "negligible" and provides support to consider that discards are insignificant and therefore this SI is not scored. We note that the AGAC fleet is monitored with human or EM observers 100% of the time.</p>	
<p>1.2.2 Harvest control rules and tools (SI b)</p>	<p>According to the Medley (2024) independent report, scoring of PI 1.2.2.b for IO yellowfin tuna would not meet SG80.</p>	<p>It is not possible to evaluate the harvest control in relation to uncertainties, because the HCR has not been defined well enough to do so. Therefore, SG80 cannot be met. The interim decision framework clearly intends that reference points and HCR under development (Res. 15/10) will be robust and this is identified as one of the criteria for evaluation. Once HCR are developed consistent with Resolution 15/10 and are implemented, SG80 would be likely met.</p>	<p>Medley et al. (2024)</p>	<p>Thank you for your comment, we agree and we scored this SI from the beginning as you suggested.</p>	<p>No change</p>
<p>1.2.2 Harvest control rules and</p>	<p>According to the Medley (2024) independent report,</p>	<p>In the case of yellowfin, the stock has declined and based on projections in the assessments before 2015 was likely to fall below its target point. The most recent assessments confirmed that this indeed had happened. Based on resolutions 16-01/17-01/18-01/19-01/21-01 a number of tools for controlling catches were adopted including percent reductions in purse</p>	<p>Medley et al. (2024)</p>	<p>Thank you for your comment. Similarly, as in previous observations, the support for your concerns here is based on the information derived from the 2021 stock assessment and our rationale was</p>	<p>No change</p>

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<p>tools (SI c)</p>	<p>scoring of PI 1.2.2.c for IO yellowfin tuna would not meet SG60.</p>	<p>seine, gillnet and other gear catch and reduction in FADs. This has been partially successful. Catches have been broadly reduced in some fleets subject to the controls, albeit the reduction has not yet met the target level over the last 5 years. Fleets exempt from such requirements have increased their catch, and the overall catch has therefore increased in 2020 to around the 2016 level and has remained significantly higher than the target.</p> <p>Resolution 19/01 threatens overages to catch limits be carried forward to 2021 and resolution 21/01 has increased the catch reductions. There is some evidence that, if catch limits are achieved, they will work in rebuilding based on projections and CPC reporting. This represents some evidence that tools used are appropriate and effective in limiting exploitation, meeting SG60. The argument here is that extending the tools to all fleets, preventing any catch increases, should be effective in limiting exploitation to the desired levels. Only one country has objected to 19/01 (to which 18/01 applies), but this increased to a further 5 countries objecting to Res. 21/01 (to which 19/01 still applies), suggesting further deterioration in the co-operation required to implement effective catch limits.</p> <p>Of recent concern has been EU-Spain purse seiners yellowfin catch reports in 2018, which make up a significant proportion of the small yellowfin catch. The discrepancy was the result of a new data processing method introduced in 2018, which resulted in a 17% reduction in the reported catch of yellowfin tuna in contrast to skipjack and bigeye which increased by 58% and 112% respectively. This has not yet been resolved in 2023, at a time when reduced catch is a requirement, and this has further undermined confidence in achieving the catch limits.</p> <p>As noted in previous evaluations, at some point, if CPCs are unwilling or unable to apply the catch limits being set out in resolutions, SG60 will not be met. Although the SSB is still well-above any candidate PRIs, so the fisheries have a little time to improve the situation, the trend in SSB has been downward. More specifically, catches in 2020 were estimated as 432624t, close to the 2016-2020 average of 434569t. The 2021 estimate of MSY was 349000t (80%CI 286000t-412000t), so that it is highly likely current catches</p>	<p>constructed using the evidence in the 2024 stock assessment report. However, we have noted the aspects included in this comment and recognize their relevance. We agree that these issues need to be monitored in future surveillance audits in terms of the effectiveness of measures applied as tools to control exploitation levels under the HCR. For now, based on the available evidence, we are keeping this SI as met at the SG60 level but not at SG80.</p>
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	<p>are unsustainable. Given that no catch reductions have been achieved since the management system set out its intent to reduce catch four years ago (Resolution 16/01), the claim that tools are appropriate now has little credibility and SG60 is not met. A clear catch reduction in line with scientific advice is required that exploitation can be limited across all fleets before the SG80 can be met.</p> <p>As a precautionary measure in order to help curb harvest on tropical tunas, Resolution 23/03 has proposed that all CPCs close their tuna fisheries for 31 consecutive days each year (or reduce equivalent catch), but excludes artisanal vessels (<12m length). This should help with reductions in mixed fisheries catches if successfully implemented.</p>			
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Table 23. ACDR stakeholder input – ISSF General comments.

Assessment stage	General comments	Evidence references	or CAB response to stakeholder input	CAB Response Code
ACDR	<p>HS Advocacy</p> <p>Continuous advocacy for the implementation of, and compliance with, robust management measures, including HCRs and MPs, is essential to ensure that catch limits are respected and, hence, effective governance at IOTC level is implemented. For that reason, ISSF reiterates its recommendation for the CAB to share the following specific actions with the client:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Publicly support the appeals for RFMOs developed by global NGOs that are participants in the NGO Tuna Forum (https://ngotunaforum.org/rfmo-advocacy/). 2) Advocate to the flag state delegations of the fishery and all other parties associated with the fishery at IOTC to take a strong public 	<p>ISSF RFMO Priorities: https://www.issf-foundation.org/tuna-stocks-and-management/fisheries-management/regional-fisheries-management-organizations-rfmos/issf-rfmo-priorities/</p> <p>ISSF IOTC Position</p>	<p>Thank you for this comment – we have passed it on to the client, but cannot require them to take action on these points specifically.</p>	No change

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	<p>position on advancing and effectively implementing management procedures and HCRs, in line with ISSF RFMO priorities and ISSF RFMO Position statements.</p> <p>3) Publicly support ISSF IOTC Position Statement that contain detailed asks on harvest strategies and harvest control rules, as well as other issues like robust compliance assessment, FAD management, bycatch mitigation and shark protection, electronic monitoring, transshipment, etc.</p> <p>4) Support technical work of the IOTC, as well as capacity workshops on Management Strategy Evaluation in the region, to support RFMO members in the adoption of robust harvest strategies and HCRs.</p>	<p>Statement: https://www.issf-foundation.org/about-issf/what-we-publish/issf-documents/2024-iotc-position-statement/</p>		
ACDR	<p>Use of preliminary data for IO YFT Stock Status</p> <p>ISSF is concerned that the scores related to IO YFT stock status are based on preliminary results by the stock assessment team and the WPTT. Stock status determinations need to be based on the final results published by the IOTC Scientific Committee. Moving forward from the ACDR, the CAB must base its scores on the IOTC SC report.</p>		<p>Thank you for this comment, it is very pertinent. We started working with the preliminary stock assessment as it was the only information available about the most recent assessment, we afterwards had access to the final report but nothing we had used changed in the final report from the preliminary one. We also used the summary of assessment and management included in the Report of the 26th Session of the IOTC Working Party on Tropical Tunas, available in November 2024, and the Report of the 27th Session of the IOTC Scientific Committee which was available to us in January 2025.</p>	No change

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Table 24. ACDR stakeholder input – WWF PI input ACDR and site visit v.2.01.

PI	Input summary	Input detail	Evidence references	or CAB response to stakeholder input	CAB response code
1.1.1 Stock status	<p>Given the high uncertainties in recruitment and biomass trends, the score of 80+ for stock status is overly optimistic and scientifically unjustified.</p>	<p>The ACDR’s score of 80 or above for the stock status of yellowfin tuna does not align with scientific evidence from the 2024 IOTC assessment and subsequent analyses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The 2024 IOTC Executive Summary highlights uncertainties in the recent assessment, noting a shift from overfished to not overfished, despite persistent catches exceeding 400,000 tonnes annually since 2015. This drastic shift undermines confidence in the results and suggests significant uncertainty in stock recovery assumptions. Dr. Froese's analysis questions the reliability of stock assessment models, emphasizing flaws such as over-reliance on highly variable recruitment estimates and questionable assumptions about productivity. The methodology changes in the longline CPUE indices (e.g., inclusion of cluster analysis) have significantly altered outcomes, without sufficient justification or transparency, further undermining the credibility of the current biomass estimates. <p>Conclusion: Given the high uncertainties in recruitment and biomass trends, the score of 80+ for stock status is overly optimistic and scientifically unjustified.</p>	<p>IOTC (2024). Executive Summary for Yellowfin Tuna Assessment. Report of the 27th Scientific Committee.</p> <p>Hoyle, S.D. (2024). Longline CPUE indices for Indian Ocean yellowfin tuna: analysis methods and their implications. IOTC-SC27-INF01.</p> <p>Froese, R. (2024). Summary analysis of the 2024 IOTC yellowfin tuna stock assessment. IOTC-SC27-INF02.</p> <p>IOTC. 2024. Oman’s Data Collection System. Document WPDCS20-15. Indian Ocean Tuna Commission.</p> <p>IOTC. 2024. Report of the 27th Session of the</p>	<p>“The 2024 IOTC Executive Summary highlights uncertainties in the recent assessment, noting a shift from overfished to not overfished, despite persistent catches exceeding 400,000 tonnes annually since 2015. This drastic shift undermines confidence in the results and suggests significant uncertainty in stock recovery assumptions.”</p> <p>RESP. This is a pertinent question. An increasing trend in estimated abundance can occur for a number of reasons, often some of them interacting to make the model yield different results. In this case, the report of the stock assessment describes procedures that were incorporated following the recommendations of a peer review process. In such case, we can only assume that model performance and reliability has increased as well as the way we understand and handle uncertainty. Had the result of the assessment be lower biomass than previously estimated, we would have equally considered that such result is more reliable than previous ones. Presently, the team considers that estimates of stock status relative to reference points presented in the 2024 stock assessment report are the most reliable at hand.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>“Dr. Froese's analysis questions the reliability of stock assessment models, emphasizing flaws such as over-reliance on highly variable</p>	No change

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			<p>Scientific Committee. Indian Ocean Tuna Commission.</p> <p>IOTC. 2024. Executive Summary on Yellowfin Tuna. Document SC27-ES04. Indian Ocean Tuna Commission.</p> <p>IOTC. 2024. Yellowfin Stock Assessment Report. Document SC27-INF02. Indian Ocean Tuna Commission.</p> <p>IOTC. 2024. Annual Report of Compliance with Catch Data Submission. Indian Ocean Tuna Commission</p> <p>Iraide Artetxe-Arrate et al. (2025). Otolith stable isotopes highlight the importance of local nursery areas as the origin of recruits to yellowfin tuna (Thunnus albacares) fisheries in the western Indian Ocean.</p>	<p><i>recruitment estimates and questionable assumptions about productivity.”</i></p> <p>RESP. The team is aware of the academic dispute about the performance of the models involved in this comment. While we will avoid providing opinions about this dispute, from our perspective, if the IOTC decided to follow advice from the latest available stock assessment, we have to assume that such decision derives from conclusions in the meeting of the WPTT and the SC. We note that integrated, statistical catch at age/length stock assessment models, are presently used around the world in a wide variety of fisheries, and challenges to the conceptual structure and implementation, have not lead to shifts in the modelling approach except for those aimed to increase the level of complexity and performance as well as reducing the number of critical assumptions. In some other cases, the changes relate more about data or biological information, model structure involving complex aspects such as size data or spatial structure. At this time, the assessment team is satisfied that an appropriate model and methodological process was followed for the IO YFT stock assessment and that the results fully warrant a passing score. If further developments occur in the coming year/s then these will be considered during annual surveillance audits.</p> <p>-----</p> <p><i>“The methodology changes in the longline CPUE indices (e.g., inclusion of cluster analysis) have significantly altered outcomes, without sufficient</i></p>	
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			<p>Fisheries Research 281 (2025) 107241.</p> <p>Pierre Feutry et al. (2024). Genome scans reveal extensive population structure in three neritic tuna and tuna-like species in the Indian Ocean. ICES Journal of Marine Science, 2024, Vol. 0, Issue 0, 1–12.</p>	<p><i>justification or transparency, further undermining the credibility of the current biomass estimates.”</i></p> <p>RESP. The stock assessment of 2024 clearly describes that species composition data were used in the standardization process to generate LL CPUE indices, and that cluster analysis was conducted to identify fisheries that target different species. The details of the procedure are described in Matsumoto et al. 2024. We do not consider that there is insufficient justification or lack of transparency.</p>	
1.1.2 Stock rebuilding	<p>The rebuilding score should reflect these ongoing challenges and the necessity for more precautionary measures.</p>	<p>The assumption that stock rebuilding is underway is premature:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 2024 IOTC report acknowledges a lack of substantial evidence for sustained recovery, given ongoing excessive catches. The required catch limit of 300,000 tonnes remains unmet. • Recruitment variability (up to a factor of four) and overestimated recent biomass increases cast doubt on claims of rebuilding success. <p>Conclusion: The rebuilding score should reflect these ongoing challenges and the necessity for more precautionary measures.</p>		<p>Thank you for your comment. The intention of this PI is to determine if, given that a stock is estimated to be reduced, a recovery procedure is implemented and has the mechanisms to demonstrate it is working on schedule. We followed the directive of the MSC Fisheries Standard which indicates in section SA2.3.1, that "teams shall only score this PI when Stock Status PI 1.1.1 does not achieve an 80 score". Because the results of the latest stock assessment indicate that stock status is consistent with the requirements of the MSC Standard for PI 1.1.1 at ≥SG80, PI 1.1.2 does not apply and was not scored.</p>	No change
1.2.1 Harvest strategy	<p>The lack of an operational and enforceable harvest strategy warrants a</p>	<p>The absence of an effective, fully implemented harvest strategy weakens the management framework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The IOTC’s reliance on optimistic biomass trends and recruitment assumptions without robust harvest strategies undermines the sustainability claims. 		<p>Thank you for your comment. The MSC Standard in GSA2.4 indicates that PI 1.2.1 evaluates the performance of a harvest strategy in a fishery, in particular with regards of the way "different elements work together to keep the stock levels consistent with reference points". Further: "Key elements of harvest strategies include:</p>	No change

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<p>much lower score.</p>	<p>lower</p>	<p>• Dr. Froese notes that a 30% reduction in catch is essential, yet no enforceable mechanism exists to ensure compliance.</p> <p>Conclusion: The lack of an operational and enforceable harvest strategy warrants a much lower score.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the control rules and tools in place, including the ability of the management system to control effort, taking into account issues such as overcapacity and its causes; • the information base and monitoring stock status and the responsiveness of the management system and fleet to stock status". 	<p>The specific aspects of the Harvest Strategy to be evaluated are in Table SA4 and we have provided extensive rationales that use the available evidence to evaluate the performance of the fishery in relation to the referred requirements. In summary, we can identify an information and monitoring system, there are stock assessments available that both draw information from the monitoring system and returns new information to it, and there is, in the language of the MSC Standard, a "generally understood HCR" in place, that is "expected to reduce the exploitation rate as the point of recruitment impairment (PRI) is approached". The evidence for this is provided in the rationale.</p>	<p>Additionally, CAB teams cannot make assumptions about whether a biomass trend or recruitment assumptions are optimistic or not where there is a scientific committee and a lengthy process (including a full peer review process) to conduct research, discuss, evaluate and use results to make management decisions. Nevertheless, if concerns or alternative hypotheses or methods are presented and discussed in the Scientific Committee and an alternative approach is found to have merit to be</p>
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				<p>incorporated in the harvest strategy, we would consider that new information within future surveillance audits as appropriate.</p>	
<p>1.2.2 Harvest control rules and tools</p>	<p>Scores should reflect the disconnect between theoretical frameworks and practical implementation.</p>	<p>While HCRs exist on paper, their implementation remains ineffective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The absence of pre-agreed mechanisms to reduce fishing effort during overfishing episodes highlights weaknesses in governance. • While Resolution 15/10 establishes interim target and limit reference points for several species, including yellowfin tuna, the resolution emphasizes that robust HCRs should be developed and assessed through Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) processes. However, there is no evidence that effective HCRs for yellowfin tuna have been fully implemented or evaluated against these benchmarks. The lack of completed MSE processes undermines the ability to ensure stock sustainability under variable fishing pressures. • The reliance on interim reference points (e.g., BLIM = 0.40 BMSY and FLIM = 1.40 FMSY for yellowfin tuna) reveals a gap in precise and robust metrics to guide management. Without clarity on whether these thresholds align with the latest scientific data, there is a risk of mismanaging the stock. • The resolution calls for precautionary measures to avoid stocks falling below limit reference points. However, there is no documented implementation of specific HCRs for yellowfin tuna that ensures these measures are effectively applied under existing uncertainty. 		<p>Thank you for your comment.</p> <p>PI 1.2.2 evaluates the harvest control rule in the harvest strategy of a fishery. This PI includes three SI, the first applies to the HCR design and application, the second applies to the level of robustness of the HCR to uncertainty, and the last one applies to tools associated to the HCR that should be effective in controlling exploitation levels. It should be noted that for each SI there are different expectations about the level of performance of each component being evaluated.</p> <p>For example, at the SG60, which is the lowest passing mark, the requirements are that HCR "are expected" to reduce exploitation, and for the tool, there should be "some evidence" that they are effective in controlling exploitation. At the SG60 level, the fishery is not required to demonstrate that the HCR is working to reduce exploitation levels, that the HCR is robust to the main uncertainties nor that the "available evidence indicates that the tools in use are appropriate and effective". We have scored each SI as meeting the SG60 requirements, but not higher. We would say that in assigning these scores, we have already included the concerns put forward in this comment in the most appropriate way that satisfies the requirements of the MSC Standard.</p>	<p>No change</p>

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The timeline for assessing HCR performance, as specified in Resolution 15/10, indicates a delay in evaluating candidate rules for yellowfin tuna. The resolution expected assessments to be completed by 2018, but this has not been clearly achieved or communicated. <p>Conclusion: Scores should reflect the disconnect between theoretical frameworks and practical implementation.</p>			
<p>1.2.3 – Infor and monitoring</p>	<p>The weaknesses in monitoring systems necessitate a lower score of 60.</p>	<p>Significant gaps in monitoring undermine data reliability:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Issues with longline CPUE indices, including the use of cluster analysis and inconsistencies in data filtering, have raised serious concerns about the reliability of the data. The absence of comprehensive data from Oman in the stock assessment process is a significant gap. Oman is a major fishing nation in the Indian Ocean, and its incomplete reporting undermines the robustness of the overall catch estimates for yellowfin tuna. This omission could lead to an underestimation of total catch levels, skewing sustainability evaluations and compliance measures. The lack of data from Oman potentially causes a systematic bias in assessing stock status. If the actual catch is higher than reported, this could mean the current biomass levels are overestimated, and fishing mortality is underestimated. This would directly challenge the assertion in the ACDR report that stock status is sustainable and information systems are sufficient. 		<p>It is acknowledged that the Oman fishery is composed mostly of an artisanal fleet (98%) and has become an important portion of the total fishing effort on yellowfin tuna. The comment refers to a relevant IOTC report (WPDCS20-15) which is quite important in this discussion. But before we get into the content of the IOTC report on Omani data we want to highlight that the main aspects that are evaluated in the different SIs of PI 1.2.3 at the SG80 level (no SI was scored higher than 80) pertain to the existence of "sufficient information" to "support the harvest strategy", a monitoring system that regularly obtains information at a level that is appropriate for the control rule, and "good information" about other removals. These requirements mean that we are not looking for the best information required by the control rule, but only to the amount and precision that allows the rule to be applied.</p> <p>Specifically, the team recognizes the complexity of the IO tuna fishery and the large number of fleets that are involved. In this context, the fishery has a monitoring system that has to coordinate the</p>	<p>No change</p>

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The IOTC-2024-WPDCS20-15 document highlights significant discrepancies in data collection, such as reliance on incomplete or outdated catch records and limited electronic monitoring systems in key nations like Oman. This undermines the comprehensiveness of monitoring efforts and compliance with established data protocols. Incomplete and unreliable data undermine the credibility of associated indicators such as stock status (1.1.1), stock rebuilding (1.1.2), and harvest strategy (1.2.1). Without comprehensive, high-quality information, the ability to design and implement effective management measures is fundamentally compromised. <p>Conclusion: The weaknesses in monitoring systems necessitate a lower score of 60.</p>		<p>efforts of the different parties and it is expected that there are differences in data quality. Nevertheless, if the Omani data are an example of a data set that is of concern, the report analysing this concluded that some underestimation of catch occurred between 2014 and 2017 but it was overestimated thereafter. The interpretation of this results in the review of the Omani data is that there are some errors in the estimation of their total YFT catch, but that cannot be considered a "significant gap" in the monitoring system of the entire IO. In the language of the MSC Standard, we concluded that the fishery is regularly monitored and sufficient information is obtained to support the control rule, meeting the requirements at the SG80 level. Overall, we consider that the concerns about the monitoring system reflected in this comment are important but are represented in the assigned score of 80.</p>	
<p>1.2.4 – Assess. of stock status</p>	<p>A more cautious scoring approach is required, reflecting these scientific criticisms.</p>	<p>The 2024 stock assessment results are highly contentious:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Both Dr. Froese and the IOTC working groups highlight concerns with the assumptions and methodologies, including inappropriate biomass targets and an over-reliance on recent recruitment spikes. <p>Conclusion: A more cautious scoring approach is required, reflecting these scientific criticisms.</p>		<p>This concerns reflected in this comment have already been addressed in the response to observations made to PI 1.1.1. Please refer to that section above.</p>	<p>No change</p>

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Table 25. ACDR stakeholder input – WWF General comments

Assessment stage	General comments	Evidence or references	CAB response to stakeholder input	CAB Response Code
ACDR	<p>1. Concerning Optimism in Stock Assessments</p> <p>The substantial differences between the 2021 and 2024 stock assessments for yellowfin tuna in the Indian Ocean raise concerns about the robustness and reliability of the data and methodologies employed. Notably, the 2024 assessment appears overly optimistic, with unexplained improvements in stock status despite persistent high catches exceeding recommended limits. These results necessitate a cautious approach to management decisions, emphasizing precautionary principles until methodological uncertainties are resolved.</p> <p>2. Pending Endorsement of Stock Assessment</p> <p>It is noteworthy that the IOTC Commission has yet to endorse the 2024 yellowfin stock assessment. The upcoming special session of the IOTC Scientific Committee, dedicated to further review and evaluation of this assessment, underscores the unresolved concerns among stakeholders and the need for a collective and transparent approach to reconciling methodological discrepancies.</p> <p>3. Methodological Gaps and Recommendations</p> <p>Significant methodological changes in 2024, such as the integration of cluster analysis for CPUE standardization and the combination of distinct regions without adequate justification, highlight potential biases in abundance indices. Reliable fishery management requires transparent and evidence-based methods, making it critical to revisit these changes through cross-regional scientific collaboration and workshops, as recommended in prior independent reviews.</p> <p>4. Diverging CPUE Trends and Biomass Estimates</p> <p>The diverging trends in CPUE and biomass estimates between the two assessments, alongside the unusual steep increases in the 2024 biomass</p>	<p>Hoyle, S.D. (2024). Longline CPUE indices for Indian Ocean yellowfin tuna: analysis methods and their implications for the indices. A comparison of IOTC-2024-WPTT26(DP)-14 and previous analyses. IOTC-2024-SC27-INFO1. 14 pp.</p> <p>Froese, R. (2024). Analysis of the 2024 IOTC yellowfin tuna stock assessment. IOTC-2024-SC27-INF02. Indian Ocean Tuna Commission.</p>	<p>We believe these comments reflect those made against specific PIs.</p> <p>We do note here, however, that whilst “<i>the IOTC Commission has yet to endorse the 2024 yellowfin stock assessment</i>”, it is the case that the Commission has yet to meet in session following the publication of the assessment. Nevertheless, we also note that the methodological and modelling approach is employed widely for different stocks and was reviewed and debated within the WPTT (Oct 2024) and SC processes (Dec 2024), and the assessment and results now sit on the IOTC website as representing the current status of the IO YFT stock (https://iotc.org/science/status-summary-species-tuna-and-tuna-species-under-iotc-mandate-well-other-species-impacted-iotc). Of course, we will consider future discussions and outcomes in the surveillance audit process.</p>	No change

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	<p>estimates, point to potential errors in model parameterization and assumptions. Recent scientific literature also underscores the tendency of modern stock assessment models to overstate productivity and recovery trajectories, emphasizing the need for more conservative and ecosystem-based targets, such as 60% of unfished biomass (B0), to ensure ecological balance and economic sustainability.</p>			
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8.5. Conditions

8.5.1. Summary of conditions closed under previous certificate

The IO yellowfin tuna (UoA 4) is being assessed as a Scope Extension of the AGAC IO Fishery, which at the time of publishing this report had undertaken its year 2 surveillance. As such, there is no previous certificate.

8.5.2. Open conditions from existing assessment

This scope extension comprises a reassessment of the IO yellowfin tuna (UoA 4) after it was assessed in the original assessment of the AGAC IO fishery, completed in July 2022 (Akroyd et al 2022⁸). At that time, only skipjack tuna (UoA 1) was assessed as meeting the MSC Standard. Two binding conditions were set on Principle 1 at that time, and six other conditions were set across Principle 2 and Principle 3 that will also apply to yellowfin tuna (UoA 4) in the event it is certified as a result of this scope extension assessment. At the same time, the non-binding conditions that were set on yellowfin tuna (#1-3) during the initial assessment will be closed.

For each of the Conditions #1 – #8 the ‘Progress status’ as reported below is as it stood following the 2nd surveillance audit, completed in January 2025.

Condition 1 – UoA 1 – SKJ PI 1.2.1 (OPEN)

Performance Indicator	P1 1.2.1 There is a robust and precautionary harvest strategy in place 1.2.1a Harvest strategy design
Score	70
Justification	Currently the stock is on target; SB ₂₀₁₉ /SB ₀ (80% CI): 0.45 (0.38–0.50). Over the history of the fishery, biomass has been well above and the fishing mortality has been well below the established limit reference points. The stock is not overfished, and overfishing is not taking place. Based on the results of the stock assessment of skipjack tuna in 2017, the Commission, following Resolution 16/02, adopted an annual catch limit of 470,029 tonnes for the years 2018 to 2020. However, total catches in 2018 (607,701t) were about 30% higher than the catch limit generated by the Harvest Control Rule (470,029 t), which applies to the years 2018–2020). The catch for 2019 was 547,248t, which is still higher than the catch for the HCR. IOTC has not as yet being able to manage the catches according to the HCR, therefore the elements of the harvest strategy are not working effectively.
Condition	By the fourth surveillance audit, the harvest strategy is responsive to the state of the stock and the elements of the harvest strategy work together towards achieving stock management objectives reflected in PI 1.1.1 SG80.
Condition start	Initial assessment, July 2022
Condition deadline	Year 4 of the certificate (2026)
Milestones	Years 1 – 3: (Expected score = 70) The client should provide evidence that, independently or jointly with industry groups, it has worked with relevant management authorities to press for IOTC action on implementing measures

⁸<https://cert.msc.org/FileLoader/FileLinkDownload.aspx/GetFile?encryptedKey=PnZF3NDgkPnAHLpcC7wlmd2zWodkCyyP2nYu oVXh7ctUUO9WlcezijDkx6jUkZX>



	<p>that are effective in ensuring catch limits for skipjack tuna set using the HCR adopted in IOTC Res16/02 (or any subsequent amendments) are not exceeded.</p> <p>Year 4: (Expected score = 80).</p> <p>The client should demonstrate that the available evidence indicates that the tools in use to ensure catch limits for skipjack tuna set using the HCR are appropriate and effective in achieving the exploitation levels required under the HCR set in IOTC Res 16/02 (or any subsequent amendments).</p>
<p>Progress on Condition (Year 1)</p>	<p>To produce the outcomes expected in the milestones for years 1-3, the fishery presented the following specific commitment tasks:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>AGAC will work with EU and the Seychelles to try to promote the implementation of measures to ensure that the catch limit of skipjack tuna is not exceeded.</i> 2. <i>AGAC will try to engage with other MSC fisheries / relevant stakeholders in the promotion of these measures.</i> 3. <i>AGAC will maintain institutional arrangements for the provision of FAD data (fine scale) for the production of indices of abundance and thus to contribute to improve the stock assessments.</i> 4. <i>AGAC will endorse work on the identification of alternative abundance indices from fisheries in the Indian Ocean.</i> 5. <i>Evaluation effects of YFT measures on SKJ catch levels.</i> <p>The fishery reported that for points 1,2 and 4: <i>through ETG (Europêche Tuna Group), a position paper has been submitted to the 27th Session of the IOTC, asking the Commission to secure the compliance of all its members, for all gears and fleets, with the tropical tuna measures in place; and asking the Scientific Committee to further progress towards resolving the issues identified in the assessments of IOTC stocks. To prepare for this meeting, the organisation met with the DG MARE in January 2023 and attended a high-level ministerial meeting, with delegates from several Indian Ocean Countries (held in the Seychelles in April).</i></p> <p>The documents provided by the fishery reflect the complexity of the political and regulatory interactions within the group of fishing nations that are members of the IOTC, but show the intent of searching and working towards consensus that would keep the economic activity of the tuna fishery functional while aiming for sustainability through proper management with the IOTC at the centre of the process. In this regard, the fishery added that: <i>through ETG, a meeting between scientists and the industry took place in January, to connect fisheries' stakeholders and scientists specialised in fisheries management, in order to consider and finance innovative solutions allowing the fleet to continue its activity while integrating future challenges.</i> The fishery presented as evidence, a document with the list of participants and another with the agenda of the meeting. Additionally, the fishery reported that: <i>through the LDAC [EU Long Distance Advisory Council], a proposal has been made to invest more resources into cooperation in the Indian Ocean, beginning at the 27th Session of the IOTC.</i></p> <p>With regards of point 3, the fishery presented evidence confirming that continues providing information on the position and acoustic records of the buoys used in association of FAD fishing in the Indian Ocean and that this information is a relevant component in the elaboration of indices of abundance used in stock assessments.</p> <p>Several documents were provided with IOTC reporting on management measures to rebuild the yellowfin tuna stock in the Indian Ocean, and information on a new Resolution (23/3) to establish a voluntary closure to fishing in the Indian Ocean aimed to conserve tropical tunas in general and</p>

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	<p>it is expected they will have a positive impact on skipjack and in particular on better control on meeting the pre-established catch limits.</p> <p>We highlight that the main purpose of this condition is to ensure that a critical element of the harvest strategy is effective and functional and, specifically, that management measures derived from the application of the control rule are effectively applied and catch limits are not exceeded. It is expected, therefore, that future engagements report directly on the important steps taken towards achieving the goals implied in the milestone, and whether the fishery has advanced or not towards meeting those goals.</p>
<p>Progress on Condition (Year 2)</p>	<p>To produce the outcomes expected in the milestones for years 1-3, the fishery presented the following specific commitment tasks:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>AGAC will work with EU and the Seychelles to try to promote the implementation of measures to ensure that the catch limit of skipjack tuna is not exceeded.</i> 2. <i>AGAC will try to engage with other MSC fisheries / relevant stakeholders in the promotion of these measures.</i> 3. <i>AGAC will maintain institutional arrangements for the provision of FAD data (fine scale) for the production of indices of abundance and thus to contribute to improve the stock assessments.</i> 4. <i>AGAC will endorse work on the identification of alternative abundance indices from fisheries in the Indian Ocean.</i> 5. <i>Evaluation effects of YFT measures on SKJ catch levels.</i> <p>At the time of the 2nd SA, the fishery reported that for points 1,2 and 4 delivered a position paper within the frame of the Europeche Tuna Group which aimed to 1) Achieve sustainable management of the Indian Ocean; 2) Ensuring an operational and equitable management of fleets and gears; and 3) Promoting transparency and fighting against IUU.</p> <p>While these points include different aspects not restricted to skipjack nor the underlying issues behind Condition 1, they all have some level of relevance that is important to mention and keep in the archives for future reference. In particular, it is important to highlight that point 1) manifested that ETG advocates the integration of all management procedures, including HCRs into a single Resolution that would also deal management actions to reduce lack of compliance.</p> <p>The point on sustainable management called signatories for cooperation and adoption of catch limits towards effective management of the tropical tuna species under IOTC jurisdiction. To this end, ETG encouraged accelerating the adoption of a “<i>robust Management Procedure</i>” for yellowfin tuna, and ensuring that all parties abide to the content of Resolution 21/01 to rebuild the stock. For skipjack ETG requested that skipjack catches do not exceed the limits established through application of the HCR and adopting a “<i>comprehensive Management Procedure</i>” for skipjack by 2025. For bigeye tuna ETG requested to ensure that catches do not exceed the limits as established in Resolution 23/04 following the Management Procedure in Resolution 22/03.</p> <p>Also, a scientific advisor was hired by ETG to conduct, among other things, alternative stock assessments of stocks as required by RFMOs, to be involved in any necessary process related to management strategy evaluations, implementation of management procedures, conduct research on bycatch of ETP species, and in general advice ETG on technical and scientific matters of interest to ETG.</p> <p>AGAC in particular provided a long list of all meetings attended in 2024 engaging with other stakeholders in aspects related to the conservation and management of stocks of interest.</p>

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	<p>AGAC is participating on project Itunnes that has the objective to develop scientific advice to reduce uncertainties associated with models for the analyses of populations and ecosystems towards effective management by RFMOs. Also, AGAC launched Selectuna to implement satlink technology to increase fishing selectivity in different oceans.</p> <p>With relation to points 3 and 4 the fishery presented evidence confirming that continues providing information on the position and acoustic records of the buoys used in association of FAD fishing in the Indian Ocean and that this information is a relevant component in the elaboration of indices of abundance used in stock assessments.</p> <p>The most relevant improvement was the passing of Resolution 24/07 that includes the new Management Procedure for skipjack in the IOTC area of competence. This resolution supersedes Resolution 21/03 on the Harvest Control Rule. The new MP will be used in 2025 to determine the catch limits for the period 2027-2029. This is significant step forward to meet the final milestone of this Condition such that the tools in use to ensure catch limits for skipjack tuna set using the HCR are appropriate and effective in achieving the exploitation levels required under the HCR set in IOTC Res 16/02 (or any subsequent amendments). The team reminds the reader that the main purpose of this condition is to ensure that a critical element of the harvest strategy is effective and functional and, specifically, that management measures derived from the application of the control rule are effectively applied and catch limits are not exceeded. More specifically, evidence must demonstrate that the tools in use are appropriate and effective in achieving the exploitation levels required under the HCRs. It will be relevant to this end to observe the reported catch in future years compared to the limits determined by the MP, which can be interpreted as evidence that the Harvest Strategy is responsive to the state of the stock and the elements of the harvest strategy work together towards achieving stock management objectives reflected in PI 1.1.1 SG80.</p>
Progress status	On target
Carrying over condition?	No
Additional information	N/A – the Condition is scheduled to be closed in Year 4 of the existing certificate.

Condition 2 – SKJ PI 1.2.2 (OPEN)

Performance Indicator	P1 1.2.2 Harvest Control Rules and Tools 1.2.2 c HCRs evaluation
Score	75
Justification	Based on the results of the stock assessment of skipjack tuna in 2017, the Commission, following Resolution 16/02, adopted an annual catch limit of 470,029 tonnes for the years 2018 to 2020. However, total catches in 2018 (607,701t) were about 30% higher than the catch limit generated by the Harvest Control Rule (470,029 t, which applies to the years 2018–2020), and there has been an increasing trend in catches over the past 4 years, including a sudden increase in catches

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	<p>in 2018 (compared to 2017, by over 20% or around 100,000 t). However, IOTC data shows a decline of 10 percent for the skipjack tuna catches since 2018 – the catch was 547,248 t in 2019.</p> <p>The median value of catch at the target fishing mortality (CSB40%) from the model runs investigated is 510,090 t with a range between 455,920 and 618,760t. Current spawning stock biomass relative to unexploited levels is estimated at 40%. Catch in 2018 (≈607,701 t) is in the upper range of the estimated range of CSB40%. The average catch over the previous five years (2014–18; ≈ 484,993 t) is at the lower range of the estimated range of CSB40%.</p> <p>The stock as yet is not overfished and overfishing is not taking place, therefore available therefore there is some evidence that the tools in use are appropriate and effective in controlling exploitation, therefore SG60 is met.</p> <p>The overall exploitation rate is appropriate, but the available evidence suggests that the catch limits set out under the HCR (i.e. the main tool to implement the HCR) may not be able to control catches to the level required by the HCR. As noted above, evidence as to how these catch limits are working is limited for the moment, but it is somewhat concerning that the issue was not directly discussed at the IOTC plenary in 2019 (although at that point 2018 catch data would only just have been available). There is an MSE process in place, based on which IOTC will presumably review the skipjack harvest strategy, although it is not clear that the 2020 plenary will take place. SG80 is not met.</p>
Condition	By the fourth surveillance audit, the client must demonstrate that available evidence indicates that the tools in use are appropriate and effective in achieving the exploitation levels required under the HCRs.
Condition start	Initial assessment, July 2022
Condition deadline	Year 4 of the certificate (2026)
Milestones	<p>Years 1 – 3: (Interim score = 75)</p> <p>The client should provide evidence that, independently or jointly with industry groups, it has worked with relevant management authorities to press for IOTC action on implementing measures that are effective in ensuring catch limits for skipjack tuna set using the HCR adopted in IOTC Res16/02 (or any subsequent amendments) are not exceeded. Score: 75.</p> <p>Year 4: (Expected score = 80)</p> <p>The client should demonstrate that the available evidence indicates that the tools in use to ensure catch limits for skipjack tuna set using the HCR are appropriate and effective in achieving the exploitation levels required under the HCR set in IOTC Res 16/02 (or any subsequent amendments). Score: 80.</p>
Progress on Condition (Year 1)	<p>To produce the outcomes expected in the milestones for years 1-3, the fishery presented the following specific commitment tasks:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>AGAC will work with EU and the Seychelles to try to promote the implementation of measures to ensure that the catch limit of skipjack tuna is not exceeded.</i> 2. <i>AGAC will try to engage with other MSC fisheries / relevant stakeholders in the promotion of these measures.</i>

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	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. <i>AGAC will maintain institutional arrangements for the provision of FAD data (fine scale) for the production of indices of abundance and thus to contribute to improve the stock assessments.</i> 4. <i>AGAC will endorse work on the identification of alternative abundance indices from fisheries in the Indian Ocean.</i> 5. <i>Evaluation effects of YFT measures on SKJ catch levels.</i> <p>The fishery reported that for points 1,2 and 4: <i>through ETG (Europêche Tuna Group), a position paper has been submitted to the 27th Session of the IOTC, asking the Commission to secure the compliance of all its members, for all gears and fleets, with the tropical tuna measures in place; and asking the Scientific Committee to further progress towards resolving the issues identified in the assessments of IOTC stocks. To prepare for this meeting, the organization met with the DG MARE in January 2023 and attended a high-level ministerial meeting, with delegates from several Indian Ocean Countries (held in the Seychelles in April).</i></p> <p>The documents provided by the fishery reflect the complexity of the political and regulatory interactions within the group of fishing nations that are members of the IOTC, but show the intent of searching and working towards consensus that would keep the economic activity of the tuna fishery functional while aiming for sustainability through proper management with the IOTC at the centre of the process. In this regard, the fishery added that: <i>through ETG, a meeting between scientists and the industry took place in January, to connect fisheries' stakeholders and scientists specialized in fisheries management, in order to consider and finance innovative solutions allowing the fleet to continue its activity while integrating future challenges.</i> The fishery presented as evidence, a document with the list of participants and another with the agenda of the meeting. Additionally, the fishery reported that: <i>through the LDAC [EU Long Distance Advisory Council], a proposal has been made to invest more resources into cooperation in the Indian Ocean, beginning at the 27th Session of the IOTC.</i></p> <p>With regards of point 3, the fishery presented evidence confirming that continues providing information on the position and acoustic records of the buoys used in association of FAD fishing in the Indian Ocean and that this information is a relevant component in the elaboration of indices of abundance used in stock assessments.</p> <p>Several documents were provided with IOTC reporting on management measures to rebuild the yellowfin tuna stock in the Indian Ocean, and information on a new Resolution (23/3) to establish a voluntary closure to fishing in the Indian Ocean aimed to conserve tropical tunas in general and it is expected they will have a positive impact on skipjack and in particular on better control on meeting the pre-established catch limits.</p> <p>As for condition 1, we highlight that the main purpose of this condition is to ensure that a critical element of the harvest strategy is effective and functional and, specifically, that management measures derived from the application of the control rule are effectively applied and catch limits are not exceeded. It is expected, therefore, that future engagements report directly on the important steps taken towards achieving the goals implied in the milestone, and whether the fishery has advanced or not towards meeting those goals.</p>
<p>Progress on Condition (Year 2)</p>	<p>To produce the outcomes expected in the milestones for years 1-3, the fishery presented the following specific commitment tasks:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>AGAC will work with EU and the Seychelles to try to promote the implementation of measures to ensure that the catch limit of skipjack tuna is not exceeded.</i> 2. <i>AGAC will try to engage with other MSC fisheries / relevant stakeholders in the promotion of these measures.</i>

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3. *AGAC will maintain institutional arrangements for the provision of FAD data (fine scale) for the production of indices of abundance and thus to contribute to improve the stock assessments.*
4. *AGAC will endorse work on the identification of alternative abundance indices from fisheries in the Indian Ocean.*
5. *Evaluation effects of YFT measures on SKJ catch levels.*

At the time of the 2nd SA, the fishery reported that for points 1,2 and 4 delivered a position paper within the frame of the Europeche Tuna Group which aimed to 1) Achieve sustainable management of the Indian Ocean; 2) Ensuring an operational and equitable management of fleets and gears; and 3) Promoting transparency and fighting against IUU.

While these points include different aspects not restricted to skipjack nor the underlying issues behind Condition 1, they all have some level of relevance that is important to mention and keep in the archives for future reference. In particular, it is important to highlight that point 1) manifested that ETG advocates the integration of all management procedures, including HCRs into a single Resolution that would also deliver management actions to reduce lack of compliance.

The point on sustainable management called signatories for cooperation and adoption of catch limits towards effective management of the tropical tuna species under IOTC jurisdiction. To this end, ETG encouraged accelerating the adoption of a “robust Management Procedure” for yellowfin tuna, and ensuring that all parties abide to the content of Resolution 21/01 to rebuild the stock. For skipjack ETG requested that skipjack catches do not exceed the limits established through application of the HCR and adopting a “comprehensive Management Procedure” for skipjack by 2025. For bigeye tuna ETG requested to ensure that catches do not exceed the limits as established in Resolution 23/04 following the Management Procedure in Resolution 22/03.

Also, a scientific advisor was hired by ETG to conduct, among other things, alternative stock assessments of stocks as required by RFMOs, to be involved in any necessary process related to management strategy evaluations, implementation of management procedures, conduct research on bycatch of ETP species, and in general advice ETG on technical and scientific matters of interest to ETG.

AGAC in particular provided a long list of all meetings attended in 2024 engaging with other stakeholders in aspects related to the conservation and management of stocks of interest.

AGAC is participating on project Itunnes that has the objective to develop scientific advice to reduce uncertainties associated with models for the analyses of populations and ecosystems towards effective management by RFMOs. Also, AGAC launched Selectuna to implement satlink technology to increase fishing selectivity in different oceans.

With relation to points 3 and 4 the fishery presented evidence confirming that continues providing information on the position and acoustic records of the buoys used in association of FAD fishing in the Indian Ocean and that this information is a relevant component in the elaboration of indices of abundance used in stock assessments.

The most relevant improvement was the passing of Resolution 24/07 that includes the new Management Procedure for skipjack in the IOTC area of competence. This resolution supersedes Resolution 21/03 on the Harvest Control Rule. The new MP will be used in 2025 to determine the catch limits for the period 2027-2029. This is significant step forward to meet the final milestone of this Condition such that the tools in use to ensure catch limits for skipjack tuna set using the HCR are appropriate and effective in achieving the exploitation levels required under the HCR set in IOTC Res 16/02 (or any subsequent amendments). The team reminds the reader that the main purpose of this condition is to ensure that a critical element of the harvest strategy is effective and functional and, specifically, that management measures derived from the application of the control rule are effectively applied and catch limits are not exceeded. More specifically, evidence must

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	demonstrate that the tools in use are appropriate and effective in achieving the exploitation levels required under the HCRs. It will be relevant to this end to observe the reported catch in future years compared to the limits determined by the MP.
Progress status	On target
Carrying over condition?	No
Additional information	N/A – the Condition is scheduled to be closed in Year 4 of the existing certificate.

Condition 3 – PI 2.1.2 (CLOSED)

Performance Indicator	<p>Primary species management strategy</p> <p>2.1.2 a – Management strategy in place</p> <p>2.1.2 b – Management strategy evaluation</p> <p>2.1.2 c – Management strategy implementation</p>
Score	75
Justification	<p>For the AGAC IO Tuna Fishery, SA 3.1.3.1 (MSC 2018a) bigeye tuna and yellowfin tuna are main primary species in scoring UoA 6 (skipjack tuna).</p> <p>Although yellowfin scores >80 for PI2.1.2 (i.e. management is in place and deemed sufficient) that is not the case for management of bigeye tuna.</p> <p>The UoA has caught an average of 18,899 t of bigeye tuna from 2014-2019 (Table 43).</p> <p>The species is subject to a range of IOTC Resolutions (see scoring rationale under PI2.1.2a) and regular stock assessments are performed by the IOTC. The status of the BET resource was estimated in 2015 as not overfished and no overfishing was taking place (83.7% in green quadrant IOTC, 2018a) however the most recent estimates show that the stock is undergoing overfishing with a probability of about 75%.</p> <p>Although Resolution 05/01 is active it has not been updated since its adoption in 2005 and is therefore not responding to the most up to date stock status and determination or fleet dynamics (increased FAD fishing effort, increased catch of juvenile bigeye tuna).</p> <p>Catches of bigeye tuna by the AGAC fleet in the Indian Ocean increased significantly from 2014 to 2017 and although they have since reduced this reduction is not attributable to effective management of the bigeye stock nor limitations set on the vessels fishing for the UoA.</p> <p>If catches remain at current levels there is a risk of breaching MSY reference points with 58.9% and 60.8% probability in 2021 and 2028. Reduced catches of at least 10% from current levels will likely reduce the probabilities of breaching reference levels to 49.1% in 2028. However, at this stage no changes have been made to the management of the species therefore the current harvest strategy is not likely to work.</p>

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	<p>With regard to this issue, the IOTC is due to debate the new stock status of bigeye tuna and develop revised management through management strategy evaluation procedures. Until such time the current measures remain in place which do not take into account the updated stock status nor require a reduction in catches. In 2020 the Spanish General Secretariat for Fisheries (SGP) issued Order APA /93/2020, of February 4, limiting the catches of yellowfin tuna by Spanish vessels fishing in the Indian Ocean and established a catch limitation for the three tropical tuna species, calculated based upon yellowfin tuna accounting for 30% of the combined tropical tuna catches. This measure is applicable to Spanish vessels only (i.e. does not cover the Seychelles vessels fishing for AGAC) and is targeted at management of yellowfin tuna as opposed to directed management of bigeye tuna for which management is deemed deficient.</p> <p>Given the current high catches (IOTC, 2019a) the stock is expected to be in an overfished state in 2021 and overfishing is already taking place ($F > F_{MSY}$). Moreover the requirement for CPCs to maintain their catches at levels reported by the IOTC SC as per Res. 05/01 has not been strictly adhered to by the AGAC fleet (Table 43) nor has the Resolution been updated and it does not explicitly require a reduction in catches to maintain the bigeye stock in a favourable state.</p> <p>The management currently in place does not cover the entirety of the UoA fleet, evaluation of Resolution 05/01 has not yet taken place and the Resolution is outdated, and evidence is lacking to suggest that the management measures currently in place are being implemented successfully.</p>
<p>Condition</p>	<p>SI a) By the fourth surveillance audit, demonstrate that there is a partial strategy in place for the UoA, if necessary, that is expected to maintain or to not hinder rebuilding of bigeye tuna at/to levels which are highly likely to be above the PRI.</p> <p>SI b) By the fourth surveillance audit, demonstrate that there is some objective basis for confidence that the measures/partial strategy will work, based on some information directly about the fishery and/or species involved.</p> <p>SI c) By the fourth surveillance audit, demonstrate there is some evidence that the measures/partial strategy is being implemented successfully.</p>
<p>Condition start</p>	<p>Initial assessment, July 2022</p>
<p>Condition deadline</p>	<p>4th Surveillance Audit, July 2026</p>
<p>Milestones</p>	<p>Year 1: (Interim score = 75)</p> <p>The client should provide evidence of developing a plan to address the condition, which could include working independently or jointly with other industry groups to press for IOTC action on developing revised management of bigeye tuna. Alternatively, the client should provide evidence of developing a plan to manage their own vessels such that the UoA can be expected to maintain or not hinder recovery of bigeye tuna at/to levels which are highly likely to be above the PRI (noting GSA3.4.6).</p> <p>Year 2: (Interim score = 75)</p> <p>The client should provide evidence of implementing the plan as presented in in Year 1, including any revisions to the plan and consideration of how the proposed approach will provide an objective basis for confidence that the measures will work.</p> <p>Year 3: (Interim score = 75)</p>

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	<p>The client should provide the initial results of implementing the plan, with analysis indicating how the revised management will provide an objective basis for confidence that the measures will work.</p> <p>Year 4: (Expected score = 80)</p> <p>Evidence is provided to demonstrate that there is a partial strategy in place that that is expected to maintain or to not hinder rebuilding of bigeye tuna at/to levels which are highly likely to be above the PRI, with analysis showing how the revised management will provide an objective basis for confidence that the measures will work, and some evidence that the partial strategy is being implemented successfully meeting SG80.</p>
<p>Progress on Condition (Year 1)</p>	<p>At the latest IOTC Commission meeting, held in May 2023, a series of new CMMs were adopted (IOTC, 2023), including as they relate to bigeye tuna the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resolution 23/4 On Establishing Catch Limits for Bigeye Tuna in the Area of IOTC Competence • Resolution 23/3 On Establishing a Voluntary Fishing Closure in the Indian Ocean for the Conservation of Tropical Tunas • Recommendation 23/11 To Enhance Cooperation in the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission Decision Making Process. <p>Also recently adopted and with relevance the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resolution 22/3 On a Management Procedure for Bigeye Tuna in the IOTC Area of Competence • Resolution 19/5 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 <p>The Management Procedure (MP), Res. 22/03, specifies under paragraph 9, that:</p> <p>Consistent with the adopted management objectives of the Commission, the management procedure is designed to achieve:</p> <p>a) a 60% probability that the bigeye tuna spawning stock biomass achieves the target reference point of SBMSY by 2034-2038;</p> <p>b) the bigeye tuna spawning stock biomass avoids breaching the interim limit reference point specified in Resolution 15/10 with a high probability;</p> <p>and operates with the following constraint:</p> <p>c) the maximum increase or decrease in the TAC shall be 15% relative to the previous TAC.</p> <p>The MP further describes the formulae for calculating TACs for the MP, the schedule for setting the TACs, plans to develop a mechanism to constrain catches to the MP derived TAC, a review of exceptional circumstances and sets a review date for the MP in 2030.</p> <p>The above constitutes a partial strategy, that takes into account the current stock status of bigeye tuna in the Indian Ocean (whereas previously Resolution 05/01 was outdated), to recover the stock to levels which are highly likely to be above the PRI, addressing scoring issue a. Though it should be noted that the updated stock assessment from 2022 is not used to provide a recommendation on the TAC As IOTC agreed on a bigeye Management Procedure (Res. 22/03). Application of the MP in 2022 results in a recommended TAC of 80,583t per year for 2024 and 2025.</p> <p><i>In 2022 a new stock assessment was carried out for bigeye tuna in the IOTC area of competence to update the stock assessment undertaken in 2019. Two models were applied to the bigeye stock</i></p>

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	<p><i>(Statistical Catch at Size (SCAS) and Stock Synthesis (SS3)), with the SS3 stock assessment selected to provide scientific advice. The reported stock status is based on a grid of 24 model configurations designed to capture the uncertainty on stock recruitment relationship, longline selectivity, growth and natural mortality. Spawning biomass in 2021 was estimated to be 25% (80% CI: 23-27%) of the unfishable levels in 2021 and 90% (75-105%) of the level that can support MSY. Fishing mortality was estimated at 1.43 (1.1-1.77) times the FMSY level. Considering the characterized uncertainty, the assessment indicates that SB2021 is below SBMSY and that F2021 is above FMSY (79%).</i></p> <p>Catch in 2021 (94,803 t) of bigeye tuna is above the recommended TAC for 2024 and 2025 from the application of the bigeye tuna MP. Achieving the objectives of the Commission for this stock will require effective implementation of the MP TAC advice by the Commission going forward, a requirement further emphasised by the current status of the stock estimated from the stock assessment to be overfished and subject to overfishing. As yet there is not an objective basis for confidence that the MP and TAC will work to constrain bigeye tuna catches in the Indian Ocean, evidence of catches at or below the TAC in the following years will be required to confirm this.</p> <p>The annual TAC for 2024 and 2025 for the European Union and the Seychelles (the two CPCs under which the AGAC UoA operates their vessels) are 17,010 t and 11,882 t respectively. The total bigeye tuna catch by UoA vessels in the Indian Ocean in 2022 was 6,763 t for Spanish vessels and 4,702 t for Seychelles vessels.</p> <p>Continued monitoring of the catch of the UoA vessels, and their contribution to the CPC TAC is required to demonstrate there is some evidence that the partial strategy is being implemented successfully. In support of the target all AGAC companies have signed the AGAC Fleet Management Plan and AGAC continues to work with the EU and coastal countries to support the IOTC to secure the compliance of all its members, for all gears and fleets, with the tropical tuna measures in place.</p>
<p>Progress on Condition (Year 2)</p>	<p>The IOTC, through Resolution 23/04, established catch limits for bigeye tuna. The Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for bigeye tuna shall be 80,583 t in 2024 and 2025 in accordance with the Management Procedure (MP) established by Resolution 22/03. Paragraph 2 of Res. 23/04 specifically refers to catch limits for the Seychelles (11,882 t) and for the European Union (17,010 t), the two predominant nations under which AGAC vessels are flagged. CPCs that are not specifically referred to in the table of paragraph 2 are encouraged to maintain catch and effort at their recent 5-years average levels (2017-2021), without prejudice to the development aspirations of those CPCs.</p> <p>In support of the catch limits, all AGAC companies have signed the AGAC Fleet Management Plan and AGAC continues to work with the EU and coastal countries to support the IOTC to secure the compliance of all its members, for all gears and fleets, with the tropical tuna measures in place.</p> <p>The establishment of catch limits (Res 23/04) following the process of the Management Procedure established by Res 22/03, and based on the updated stock assessment from 2022, constitutes a partial strategy (scoring issue a) and provides an objective basis for confidence that the partial strategy will constrain catches and meet the objectives of recovering the bigeye stock above the PRI and towards biomass consistent with B_{MSY} (scoring issue b). As a result, following the Year 2 surveillance the scoring guidepost requirements at SG80 are met for both scoring issues a and b (see the Audit report where those scoring issues are re-scored).</p> <p>Scoring issue c by contrast requires some evidence that the measures/partial strategy is being implemented successfully. Total IO catch of bigeye tuna in 2021 (94,803 t) and 2022 (102,266) was above the recommended TAC (80,583t) for 2024 and 2025. Estimated catches for 2023 amounted to 105,369 t.</p>

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In support of the catch limits, all AGAC companies have signed the [AGAC Fleet Management Plan](#) and AGAC continues to work with the EU and coastal countries to support the IOTC to secure the compliance of all its members, for all gears and fleets, with the tropical tuna measures in place.

Table 22. Bigeye catch by the UoA vessels fishing for AGAC in the Indian Ocean since 2014.

Year	Bigeye (t)
2014	11,124
2015	12,582
2016	12,971
2017	30,371
2018	24,412
2019	21,934
2020	11,260
2021	12,151
2022	12,286
2023	13,014

The total bigeye tuna catch by UoA vessels in the Indian Ocean in 2023 was 7,511 t for Spanish vessels and 5,024 t for Seychelles vessels. In both cases, these are well within limits specified by Res. 23/04. For Mauritian flagged UoA vessels (n=3) catches of bigeye tuna in 2023 amounted to 479 tons. The Kenyan flagged vessel has been included in the UoAs since 04 November 2024 and hence catches from this vessel are not presented in this annual surveillance report. The additional Kenyan and Mauritian vessels operating under the AGAC consortium in the Indian Ocean provide an increased availability of bigeye tuna to AGAC UoA. It is clear that UoA vessels have operated within the management limits specified by the IOTC, so whilst total catches of bigeye tuna in the IO in 2023 are in excess of the proposed 2024 and 2025 TAC, there is already some evidence that the measures/partial strategy is being implemented successfully. However, whilst there is a TAC in place, with catch limits, it is only in effect from 2024.

Importantly, in the catches by AGAC vessels have declined significantly and for the last four years now represent only approximately half of the peak of the 2017-2019 years). Catches in the last four years have averaged 12.4% of the total IO BET catch during that time period (mean total BET catch for the IO = 98,389 t, <https://iotc.org/data/datasets/latest/NC/SCI>), which is well below the 30% level that the MSC considers may normally be influential in hindering recovery in a marginal sense (GSA3.4.6, MSC 2018). In combination with the introduction of Resolution 23/04 and the AGAC Fleet Management Plan, this provides at least some evidence that the measures/partial strategy is being implemented successfully, and it is considered that SG80 is now met. As such, this condition can be closed.

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	SG100 is not met as the strategy has only recently been applied and there is not yet considered to be evidence of achieving its overall objective.
Progress status	Closed
Carrying over condition	No
To be closed during reassessment or transition assessment	N/A – the Condition is scheduled to be closed in Year 4 of the existing certificate.

Condition 4 – PI 2.3.3 (OPEN)

Performance Indicator	2.3.3 (a). Information adequacy for assessment of impacts.
Score	75
Justification	Silky shark, oceanic whitetip shark and Olive Ridley sea turtles are species that are known to be at risk from entanglement in FADs (ISSF 2019). At the site visit, additional confirmation was sought on the level of observed entanglement in FADs deployed and fished by the AGAC fleet, and the assessment team was pointed to the data sheets and summary tables as provided by AZTI from observed sets and FAD visits, which indicate very few instances of entanglement in the lower entanglement risk FADs now in use in the fishery. AZTI and an AGAC skipper interviewed during the site visit also commented that entanglements were now very rare. Overall, while it is clear that data on catches alone would support a high score for the fishery, without a review of the data, including of the total number of FADs in use of different types, annually, and of the potential risk posed by lost FADs (that may degrade over time and are not represented in the observer data), at present it is only possible to say that there is qualitative information that is adequate to estimate the UoA related mortality on ETP species.
Condition	SI a) By the fourth surveillance audit, demonstrate that some quantitative information is adequate to assess the UoA related mortality and impact and to determine whether the UoA may be a threat to protection and recovery of ETP species (i.e., silky shark, oceanic whitetip shark and Olive Ridley sea turtle).
Condition start	Initial assessment, July 2022
Condition deadline	4 th Surveillance Audit, July 2026
Milestones	Year 1: (Interim score = 75)

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	<p>The client will need to provide evidence that it has developed a plan to address the condition for silky shark, oceanic whitetip shark and Olive Ridley sea turtle, including to account for unobserved mortality in FADs that are being fished actively and FADs that have been lost and may still entangle these species until removed from the system (e.g., because they are acquired by another party, sink or beach).</p> <p>Year 2: (Interim score = 75)</p> <p>The client will need to provide evidence that the plan as presented in Year 1 is being implemented, including presenting any initial assumptions about unobserved mortality rates. If any modification to the plan have been required, these shall be justified at this time.</p> <p>Year 3: (Interim score = 75)</p> <p>The client will need to present the results of the work to the extent possible, showing continued implementation of the plan as presented in Year 1 (or as modified as necessary in Year 2).</p> <p>Year 4: (Expected score = at least 80)</p> <p>The client will need to present the data and analysis showing that some quantitative information is adequate to assess the UoA related mortality and impact and to determine whether the UoA may be a threat to protection and recovery of silky shark, oceanic whitetip shark and Olive Ridley sea turtle as ETP species.</p>
<p>Progress on Condition (Year 1)</p>	<p>At the year 1 audit, the client provided the Team with two key documents provided by AZTI. The first was a copy of a project proposal to OPAGAC (AZTI 2023a) and the second a working plan, reflecting that the proposal has been accepted and the work will proceed (AZTI 2023b). A progress report on the Mortality of endangered, threatened, and protected species study (AZTI 2023c) was provided that updated the status of actions under the project to 09 September 2023.</p> <p>The project has a series of specific objectives, with a focus extending beyond just obtaining quantitative information on unobserved shark mortality associated with FADs. AZTI 2023b states:</p> <p><i>“The overall objective of this project is to determine the fishing mortality of vulnerable species (such as sharks, turtles, and rays) in the tropical tuna purse seine fishery conducted by OPAGAC.</i></p> <p><i>The specific objectives of the project are:</i></p> <p><i>Evaluate the evolution of the entanglement rate by FAD type and vulnerable species in the different oceans.</i></p> <p><i>Estimate the post-release survival rate of vulnerable species such as sharks, rays and turtles released from vessels where good practices are applied.</i></p> <p><i>Evaluate the effectiveness of release tools tested on board (e.g. ramps, hoppers, grids).</i></p> <p><i>Evaluate the contribution of the measures implemented by OPAGAC to the reduction of fishing mortality of vulnerable species in the tropical tuna purse seine fishery.”</i></p> <p>The proposed methodology includes reviewing observer data records of FAD visits to consider historic entanglement, the use of underwater camera drops at new FAD visits to look for entangled sharks (with detailed recording of FAD construction details), and satellite tagging of sharks (silky sharks mainly, but oceanic whitetip sharks where opportunity allows, noting they are rarely caught as bycatch) to better understand the risks posed to sharks of later entanglement. Together with catch data, and blood lactate and cortisol sampling that will be used to estimate the risk posed of post-release mortality across a wider sample of animals, the project aims to derive an estimate of the overall impact on ETP species of the AGAC fisheries in each of the four oceans in which the AGAC fleet operates.</p>

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With regard to the success of the planned project, it is noteworthy that an AGAC vessel undertook a silky shark tagging project with AZTI in the EPO in summer 2022 (AZTI 2022). 16 sharks were tagged with 60-day archival pop-up tags, with data from 13 tags reported to have been collected. Further cruises are underway and initial results of the tagging campaign in the Atlantic Ocean are available (AZTI 2023c); during 2024 additional scientific cruises will be carried out to cover the Indian and Pacific oceans. In the Atlantic one opportunistic trip for tagging rays (July 2023) and a second to tag silky sharks and rays (27th of August – results pending) were conducted by an experienced scientist on tagging. There were no interactions with mobulids. In total 23 tags were deployed in silky sharks. In addition, blood samples were collected in 80 sharks for measuring lactate levels. The techniques and data collected from these projects will be combined to allow for a greater sample size, and appear likely to provide a useful basis for further work.

The assessment team was also provided with human and electronic observer data for the two most recent years (2021-2022). Human observer data are collected by either AZTI or IEO observers. The catch profile generated from these data did not reveal any new or previously not recorded ETP species (Table 27). Electronic data are processed through seven onboard cameras, three above deck and four below deck. The purpose is to monitor compliance with the Code of Good Practice (CGP) that includes as a requirement accounting for and safe handling and release of all rays, sharks, and turtles. Data collected by EM are combined with data collected by human observers to review compliance with the CGP. Consequently, for ETP species and CGP compliance monitoring there is 100% observer coverage onboard the AGAC vessels in the Indian Ocean. However, the effective level of coverage (i.e., where the data have been received and verified) for the 2021-2022 period was 94% of sets or 306 out of 324 trips (AZTI, 2023e). The total number of each species reported to have interacted with AGAC vessels (n=14) in the Indian Ocean for each year (2021 and 2022) is reported in Table 27. There are no new ETP species in the reported observations and the number of interactions per year are in line with the numbers reported for the initial assessment period (2015-2018), i.e. the level of impact has not increased. Observer data for the period 2019-2020 have been requested from the client.

To account for mortality of ETP species that may have been entangled by FADs but would have detached from the FAD or been eaten by other fish before the FAD is fished and entanglement observed, underwater observations, sampling with underwater cameras using a GoPro Multi-Camera system during visits to FADs has been tested (AZTI 2023c). Tests in the Bay of Biscay (May 2023) demonstrated that the GoPro multi-camera system is a valuable tool for recording FADs and observing marine life in challenging environments. The system proved to be resilient and capable of providing high quality data, though further tests are needed for developing a protocol for applying it in real conditions at sea.

This condition was set on the basis of unobserved mortality that may occur in the fishery, with the initial assessment being based on 2015-2018 data, during which time AGAC vessels deployed lower-entanglement risk (LER) FADs. LERFADs were required to be constructed no netting or only netting <7cm in the raft part of the FAD, and no netting or only netting tied into bundles / sausages in the tail part of the FAD. Whilst entanglement in LERFADs was considered unlikely, there is some chance that such FADs could become 'entangling' over time if the materials degrade or the bundles / sausages became untied.

The same condition was set in each of AGAC's four certificates and is intended to understand the risks posed by FAD use (and specifically by the AGAC fisheries) in the WCPO, EPO, IO and AO. Nevertheless, progress is assessed separately for each certificate. In the Indian Ocean, however, the use of fully non-entangling FADs was mandatory as of 01 January 2020 through Resolution 19/02. NEFADs are constructed with no netting in the raft or tail parts, such that the risk posed of entanglement in them is minimal to non-existent. In each interaction with FADs, observers (i.e. human observers onboard the purse seiners and supply vessels and/or EMS) register the FAD characteristics (i.e. presence of net and net size in the raft and submerged structure of the FAD)

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and information on the presence/absence of the ETP species entangled and the number of specimens in each case.

An update to the project on the *Optimization of FADs use* was provided to the assessment team (AZTI 2023d). Regarding the information collected by observers, FADs have been constructed mainly with non-entangling netting up to 2020 (Figure). The FADs with mesh that were registered in 2020 referred, mainly, to legacy FADs and/or FADs that could be deployed in 2019 and that had nets with < 7 cm mesh (which was allowed in 2019, but not in 2020). Note that the number of FADs left at sea refers to the FADs deployed by the vessel and any other FAD found and left at sea after a non-planned visit (i.e., number of FADs at departure includes FADs left at sea belonging to the vessel and those that do not). This accounts for the occurrence in the data of FADS left at sea with entangling characteristics (Figure 3, Ind_6). Continued application of the CGP and concerted effort by vessels to repair or replace FADs with entangling characteristics has been recommended by AZTI to eliminate non-compliant FADs.

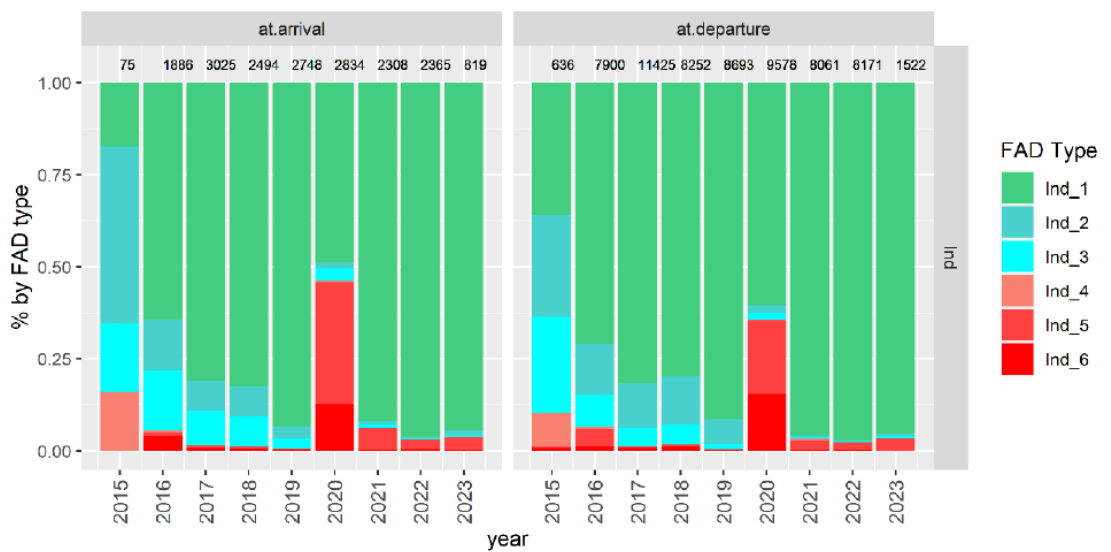


Figure 3. Percentage of FADs in each class, classified according to the Code of Good Practices indices (excluding non-visible FADs). Source: AZTI 2023d)

Progress on Condition (Year 2)

At the year 2 audit, the principal piece of evidence provided to the assessment team was a report on progress with the project “Mortality of endangered, threatened, and protected species” (Grande et al 2024).

“The overall objective of this project is to determine the fishing mortality of vulnerable species (such as sharks, turtles, and rays) in the tropical tuna purse seine fishery conducted by OPAGAC.

The specific objectives of the project are:

Evaluate the evolution of the entanglement rate by FAD type and vulnerable species in the different oceans.

Estimate the post-release survival rate of vulnerable species such as sharks, rays and turtles released from vessels where good practices are applied.

Evaluate the effectiveness of release tools tested on board (e.g. ramps, hoppers, grids).

Evaluate the contribution of the measures implemented by OPAGAC to the reduction of fishing mortality of vulnerable species in the tropical tuna purse seine fishery.”

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A summary of information for the objectives linked to the determination of ETP species mortality, including through unobserved mortality from entanglements, is provided.

Evolution of FAD entanglement potential (Grande et al 2024)

In the Indian Ocean, the presence of higher risk entanglement FADs practically disappeared in 2023 (i.e., 0.24%), while the non-entangling FADs prevailed in the last surveyed year (i.e., 97.57%).

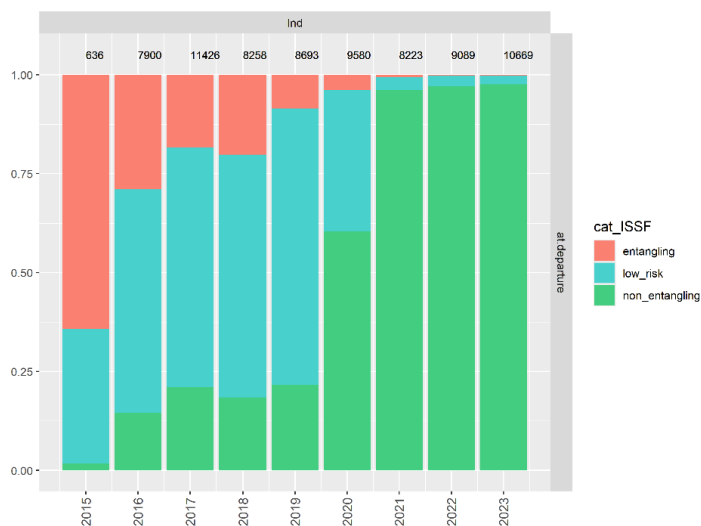


Figure 8. Evolution of FAD entanglement potential in the Indian Ocean from 2015 to 2023. The numbers on the top refer to the evaluations made when the FADs are left in the water after a deployment, visit, or set. FADs were classified according to ISSF entanglement-type criteria. Source: AZTI, 2024a.

Observed entanglement rate (Grande et al 2024)

Both on-board human observers and electronic monitoring systems collect data on the presence of entangled species. When possible, physical observers also determine the number of individuals entangled and/or detailed species. In some cases, FADs cannot be completely checked, as the submerged part of the FAD is not visible whilst it is drifting in the water. Thus, observed entanglement rate based on visited FADs may be underestimated in part due to the partial absence of underwater observations (AZTI, 2024a). Analysis completed in the first year of the project (Grande et al 2023) focused only on human observer data and analysis included the distinction of species reported by observers and observed entanglement rate for species groups rays, sharks and turtles, but without distinction of FAD entangling category. Grande et al 2024 extended the analysis to include information collected by both physical and electronic observers, and estimated the rate of entangled ETPs by each ISSF FAD entanglement category (discarding those cases that were not visible to the human or EM observers). Analysis was presented for the period 2015-2023 for all FADs where the observer was able to observe the underwater tail of the FAD. Based on the information collected by both physical and electronic observers, the rate of entangled ETPs by each ISSF FAD entanglement category was determined (Figure 9).

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ISSF FAD category	n assessed FADs	FADs with entangled fauna	Rate
Higher entanglement risk	3,281	6	0.0018
Lower entanglement risk	13,741	18	0.0013
Non-entangling	15,616	12	0.0008

Figure 9. Estimates of observed entanglement rate from data collected from 2015 to 2023 by ISSF FAD category for the OPAGAC-AGAC fleet in the Indian Ocean. Source: AZTI 2024a.

Most of the FADs classified as higher entanglement risk FADs after 2014 were because some fishers continued to employ old purse seine netting to wrap around the raft elements (e.g., bamboo canes, corks) to reinforce its structural integrity. Even though most fishers laid canvases on top of the raft's purse seine mesh to minimize entanglement risks, the use of non-tied up large mesh material was sufficient to categorize these floating objects as higher entanglement risk FADs. As shown by the observer data, in most of these higher entanglement risk FADs, the tail or submerged part had a lower entanglement risk FADs configuration (i.e., small mesh or larger mesh tied up into bundles).

An annual estimate of observed entanglement mortality was determined and provided for 2023 by multiplying the observed entanglement rate by the number of FADs in each category, multiplied by the number of number of days in a year. The annual number of potential ETP entanglements in the Indian Ocean for 2023 was estimated at 1,149 individuals (Figure 10).

n FADs per vessel	n vessel	ISSF category	% FADs	n FADs	Entanglement rate	Daily entanglements	Annual entanglements
242	16	Higher risk entanglement	0.24	9	0.0018	0.016	6
		Lower risk entanglement	2.18	84	0.0013	0.109	40
		Non-entangling	97.58	3779	0.0008	3.023	1,103

Figure 10. Estimated number of daily active FADs, % and number of FADs per ISSF FAD entanglement category, entanglement rate per ISSF category, estimated daily and annual entanglement rates for 2023 in the Indian Ocean. Source: AZTI 2024a.

As the composition of entangled species was unknown, no estimates of entangled fauna by species group were calculated. The condition refers specifically to silky shark, oceanic whitetip shark and Olive Ridley sea turtle. It is anticipated that further investigation during Year 3 and Year 4 of the program will yield additional information on the species composition of the entangled fauna.

Unobserved entanglement rate (Grande et al 2024)

Direct underwater observation

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	<p>Prototype underwater camera rigs were developed by AZTI and underwater observations were conducted using the preferred developed prototype during two fishing trips in AGAC purse seine vessels in January-February and April 2024 in the Indian Ocean. The presence/absence and number of entangled ETP species were noted based on the underwater observations. Moreover, FAD structure and its entanglement potential were also recorded. The protocol defined to obtain the image and videos used to estimate shark entanglements in FADs was simple and easy to implement and thus it might be possible to engage fishermen in the FAD inspection operations in the future.</p> <p>81 FADs were sampled between January and May 2024 in the western Indian Ocean. All except one of the FADs observed by underwater surveillance were categorized as non-entangling FADs. The exception was a cage type non-entangling FAD that presented a tangled-up large mesh net at the bottom of its structure and therefore was categorized as a higher risk entanglement FAD.</p> <p>Only one entangled shark was found during the underwater observation surveys, and it was associated with the FAD that had the net tangled up.</p> <p><u>Detection of entanglements by satellite tag analyses</u></p> <p>Two satellite tagging campaigns were carried out during 2024 in the Indian Ocean aboard Itsas Txori (January-February) and Txori Argi (April-May). 32 tags were deployed on silky sharks. Five tags did not transmit vertical movement information, seven sharks died following the fishing operation (release reason too deep after <1 day), six tags were released after the scheduled release period (30 or 60 days), one tag was recaptured showing normal vertical movement before recapture. Excluding the aforementioned tags, from the 32 tags deployed 13 could be reviewed for vertical behaviour to indicate possible tag release following entanglement.</p> <p>Data of sharks tagged with SPAT tags that had tag release reason "too deep" or "premature" and for which days post-release indicated the sharks did not die immediately after the tagging operation (<1), and for which vertical movement behaviour data were available, included the following (n=17): 52214, 252196, 252194, 252197, 252185, 252195, 252191, 252206, 252209, 262514, 262518, 262520, 262509, 262502, 262496, 262503, 262487.</p> <p>It is not immediately clear to the assessment team why there is a discrepancy in the stated number of tags that could be reviewed (n=13) and the apparent number per table 5 of AZTI (2024a).</p> <p>Per Filmlalter et al 2013 analysis, only sharks that did not display direct post-release mortality (i.e. immediately sinking to a depth of >1600 m after release) were included. They attributed death by entanglement to tagged sharks that revealed an abrupt cessation of vertical movements followed by a constant depth reading close to the surface, followed by tags sinking to depths >1600 m.</p> <p>AZTI (2024a) states that during the 578 days monitored for sharks with satellite tags for which vertical movement profiles were available that no FAD entanglements were recorded. It is not clear to the assessment team, from the vertical movement profiles presented (for example Tag #252197 and Tag #252209), how this conclusion was reached. It would be helpful to have a clear methodology and approach available from AZTI, to clarify the thresholds (duration of vertical movement cessation) they applied to distinguish between natural mortality and mortality by entanglement.</p> <p>There has been a significant effort towards determining an observed and unobserved mortality entanglement rate, through observer data review, direct underwater observations and satellite tagging. Further work is scheduled for the remainder of the certificate cycle and this condition is considered on target.</p>
Progress status	On target

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Carrying over condition	No
To be closed during reassessment or transition assessment	N/A – the Condition is scheduled to be closed in Year 4 of the existing certificate.

Condition 5 – PI 2.4.3 (OPEN)

Performance Indicator	2.4.3 (b).
Score	75
Justification	<p>The Assessment Team was provided with information on the total number of FADs in use over time by different UoA vessels and there is also evidence that the fleet maintains it operational buoys within the limits set by the IOTC, and information was provided to the assessment team on the instances and timing of support vessels servicing derelict or damaged FADS and re-deploying them.</p> <p>Information on total FAD loss and abandonment is not available to determine the spatial extent of interactions of lost or abandoned FADs for all coastal and island habitats where it is likely that they occur and it was not possible to determine how many FADs might be lost annually from the system and then pose a risk to VME habitats from beaching. Further, FAD management plans lack elements of FAD traceability and FAD fate to better understand the spatial extent of interactions, quantify stranding's of abandoned or lost FADs, study FAD trajectories and target areas for FAD retrieval programs.</p>
Condition	SI b) By the fourth surveillance audit, demonstrate that information is adequate to allow for identification of the main impacts of the UoA on the VME habitats, and there is reliable information on the spatial extent of interaction and on the timing and location of use of the fishing gear.
Condition start	Initial assessment, July 2022
Condition deadline	4 th Surveillance Audit, July 2026
Milestones	<p>Year 1: (Interim score = 75)</p> <p>The client will need to provide evidence that it has developed a plan to address the condition for VME habitat information, including to quantify the number of FADs of different types deployed by vessels in the UoA over time, and to account for FADs that are lost and subsequently pose a risk to VME habitats from beaching. This may include developing mechanisms for verifying ownership of active and lost or abandoned FADs, and for predicting the destiny of lost or abandoned FADs.</p>

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	<p>Year 2: (Interim score = 75)</p> <p>The client will need to provide evidence that the plan as presented in Year 1 is being implemented, including any changes in the data collection processes required to enable vessel-specific new FAD deployment and FAD loss rates to be determined, the methodology proposed to calculate the total deployment and loss rates of FADs in the UoA, and any assumptions on UoA-specific FAD beaching probability.</p> <p>Year 3: (Interim score = 75)</p> <p>The client will need to present initial results of the work undertaken to quantify annual FAD deployment and loss rates, and estimated total FAD beaching number.</p> <p>Year 4: (Expected score = 80)</p> <p>The client will need to present the data and analysis showing that information is adequate to allow for identification of the main impacts of the UoA on the VME habitats, and there is reliable information on the spatial extent of interaction and on the timing and location of use of fishing gear, thus meeting SG80.</p>
<p>Progress on Condition (Year 1)</p>	<p>At the site visit, an update to the project on the <i>Optimization of FADs use</i> was provided to the assessment team (AZTI 2023d).</p> <p>The project has a series of specific objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quantify the number of different types of FADs deployed by OPAGAC-AGAC vessels over time. - Evaluate trends in FAD loss and stranding events. - Study FAD drift patterns to assess impacts in relation to FAD dynamics and identify mitigation options. - Review the data collection mechanism and propose improvements, if necessary, to fill the data gaps identified to evaluate the indicators of FAD use. <p>Since 2020, (Resolution 19-02) the number of operational buoys that a vessel can use at any one time is 300, with the maximum number of purchases set at 500 buoys. All buoys must be activated on board the tuna fishing vessel or associated tender prior to deployment. Furthermore, Resolution 19-02 includes additional measures limiting the number of instrumented buoys (equivalent to the total number of buoys in stock and operational) per vessel at any time to 500 buoys. Also, each instrumented buoy should be registered on board, before and after each fishing trip (Res19-02, paragraph 7). Finally, the reactivation of a buoy will only be possible once it has passed through port (Res19-02, paragraph 8).</p> <p>Res 19/02, states that non-entangling FAD construction guidelines should be fully implemented by 1st of January of 2020 in the IOTC area. In addition, to reduce the potential marine debris generated using FADs, from 2022 onwards CPCs should encourage their flag vessels to use biodegradable materials in FAD construction. Vessels should also remove from the water and dispose in port all FADs not following the standards.</p> <p>Results from the Indian Ocean gathered by observers indicate that in some cases FADs with entangling criteria still occur at both arrival and departure (Figure, Ind_6).</p> <p>Based on FAD logbook records, deployments are occurring in the western side of the Indian Ocean (AZTI, 2023d), mainly west of 65°E. From November to April deployment activity is registered in the Mozambique Channel. All year-round deployment records are occurring from 10°S to 20°N. Between January and March, this is more centred in the west equator and then the deployments spread north and south. Usually the activity is higher in the west, but during May-June and October-November there are significant records identified north-east Seychelles.</p>

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The analysis of buoy GPS information described in Santiago et al. (2017) and Baidai et al. (2022) data processing criteria are being conducted to proceed with the quantitative analysis of buoy use and strandings.

The client also presented information on a range of other FAD-related activities and projects that they have engaged in or have planned for the upcoming period, as follows:

- 1) FAD- WATCH (Undercurrent News 2023). The Seychelles Fishing Authority (SFA), Sustainable Indian Ocean Tuna Initiative (SIOTI), and the Spanish Association of Tuna Freezers (AGAC) have united to launch the "FAD Watch Project". All European tropical tuna purse seiners are part of this initiative: ANABAC and ORTHONGEL are members of SIOTI alongside the Indian Ocean canning industry, and OPAGAC participates through AGAC.

The fleet's vessels will provide the SFA with their dFAD satellite tracking data and online software. This information will pinpoint the locations of dFADs entering the perimeters of eighteen islands, ensuring timely recovery before they affect marine ecosystems and allowing risk assessment of potential drifting zones, the groups claim.

The memorandum also includes deploying the coastguard vessel Saya de Malha to recover dFADs and returning them to Mahe, Seychelles, for disposal, reuse or recycling by agents of the SIOTI and AGAC fleets.

- 2) The IOTC adopted a 72-day closure period for the use of dFADs in early 2023. The E.U. later formally objected to the new rules. After the initial rules passed, the E.U. put forth a proposal of its own on dFADs that would delay the start of any new rules, and defer the issue to the IOTC Scientific Committee. The E.U. disagreed with the 72-day closure period arguing that it was not scientifically based.
- 3) A follow-up proposal and initial findings of a project to investigate biodegradable FAD construction options was presented to the Audit Team (Sinexia 2023). The following planned substitutions or additions to FAD materials in the Indian Ocean include the following:

Replacement of the tail with bio cables; Replacement of plastic floats by Bio material floats; Change of tails and incorporation of cotton panels; Include 100% cotton fabrics in rafts and tails; Use of 100% cotton ropes and braids coated with wax. Integrate basalt cables; and Use of vegetable fibre ropes.

The report indicated that as yet in the Indian Ocean 0% of FADs incorporate these biodegradable materials. The assessment team however visited the net yard of Albacora group, that represents seven of the UoC vessels fishing in the Indian Ocean, where they witnessed the construction of FADs in progress and the use of bio-cables to replace the tail materials.

- 4) AGAC's commitment to working within 'Project ReCon', where lost FAD buoys and echo-sounders are collected and repurposed for a variety of other purposes including scientific studies, marine debris monitoring and other uses (Undercurrent News 2022).
- 5) The Nature Conservancy and Nature Union have led on the Seychelles Marine Spatial Planning (SMSP).
 - After an initial debt conversion of Seychelles sovereign debt by TNC - \$21.5 million. Seychelles committed to conserving 50% of land and 30% of ocean.
 - 15% MSP 1 and 15% MSP 2 zones are a binding requirement of debt conversion.
 - MSP Zone 1 – support vessels are permitted to enter to collect FADs. Fishing vessels have right of passage.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MSP Zone 2 – purse seine fishing and support vessel operations FADs. • MSP Zone 1 and Zone 2 are already gazetted under the Nature Conservation Act. • Through the SWIOFish 3 project a sensitivity map for FAD risk is to be completed by June 2024 – initially including just the risk of FAD “sink” areas relative to the MSP zones but this might one day inform “source” areas and rules surrounding timing and location of deployments.
<p>Progress on Condition (Year 2)</p>	<p>The principal product of interest at this Year 2 audit is Uranga et al. 2024. This is a report on the AZTI project to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quantify the number and type of FADs deployed by OPAGAC vessels, - Evaluate the trends of FAD losses and strandings, - Study FAD drift patterns to assess impacts in relation to FAD dynamics and identify mitigation options, and - Review the data collection mechanism and propose improvements, if necessary, to fill the data gaps identified to evaluate the indicators of FAD use. <p>This usefully compares the different FAD measures in place in different RFMOs, and presents the observer and logbook data that has been collected to date on the size, design, materials, number and location of FADs deployed by the client fleet. Importantly, AZTI provide confirmation of compliance by Indian Ocean operating vessels with the 300 FAD buoy limit and adherence to the FAD-closure period (AZTI 2024).</p> <p>Analysis of raw buoy positions allows different indicators of FAD use to be obtained by year and ocean. The following indicators are available:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Records: Total number of records in the database (DB). – Total buoys: Total number of buoys monitored throughout the year (number of different buoy’s codes in the DB) – New buoys: Buoys that were not active at the beginning of the year (were not in the DB the 1st of January, or 30 or 31 December of the previous year) – Daily Active: Average number of buoys monitored per vessel throughout the year (number of different buoy’s code associated to each vessel) – Deployments: Number of deployments. A record is considered a deployment when the buoys’ code appears for the first time in the DB or the time interval with the previous record of the same buoy is at least 30 days. The deployment is counted only if the period between the first and the last record of the corresponding buoy trajectory is at least 40 days. The deployments aim to reflect new FAD deployments, but the deployment of a buoy in a FAD or on other floating object found drifting at sea cannot be always discarded. – Buoys deployed: Number of buoys deployed. Number of different buoy’s codes in the deployments. – Deactivated: Number of deactivations. Buoys that have been deactivated by the buoy providers companies after the request of the vessel owner. A buoy can be deactivated several times in its lifetime. – Lost: A buoy is considered lost when its code no longer appears in the DB (in the current year and the first semester of the following year). Beaching events are counted within this group, together with those sunk, appropriated, or any other issue which can cause the loss of the buoy position (e.g., battery failure, satellite connection loss). – Beached: A buoy is considered beached when its code no longer appears in the DB and the last presence occurs on land. Beaching events are underestimated as the beaching events of deactivated buoys cannot be quantified.

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These indicators will be estimated in two sets of analyses using different types of filtering criteria. These analyses will be performed based on raw buoy positions quality controlled (QC) based on the removal of impossible dates, positions and the on-board positions. The on-board filter differs between the two methods. One applies 4 knots filtering to detect on-board positions (Santiago et al., 2017) and the second one is based speed threshold and speed changes (Baidai et al., 2022), classifying a position on-board based if the buoy velocity exceeded 3 m/s, which exceeds current velocities generally found in the ocean and speed changes.

Once the QCs for all the oceans are finished, analyses will be performed, calculating the number of records for the above-mentioned indicators by ocean and year (as with the Santiago et al., 2017 approach) and also by different kinds of areas: saltmarshes, marine protected areas (MPAs), coral reefs, exclusive economic zones (EEZs), seagrasses and mangroves.

In the Indian Ocean, the number of FAD strandings in coral areas is estimated to be higher than in the Atlantic due to the greater extent of coral reefs (Figure 11). This estimate does not include deactivated buoys nor does it account for any potentially recovered FADs. This can lead to an underestimation of the actual effectiveness of the recovery efforts, emphasizing the need for more comprehensive tracking, reporting and data integration mechanisms (Uranga et al 2024).

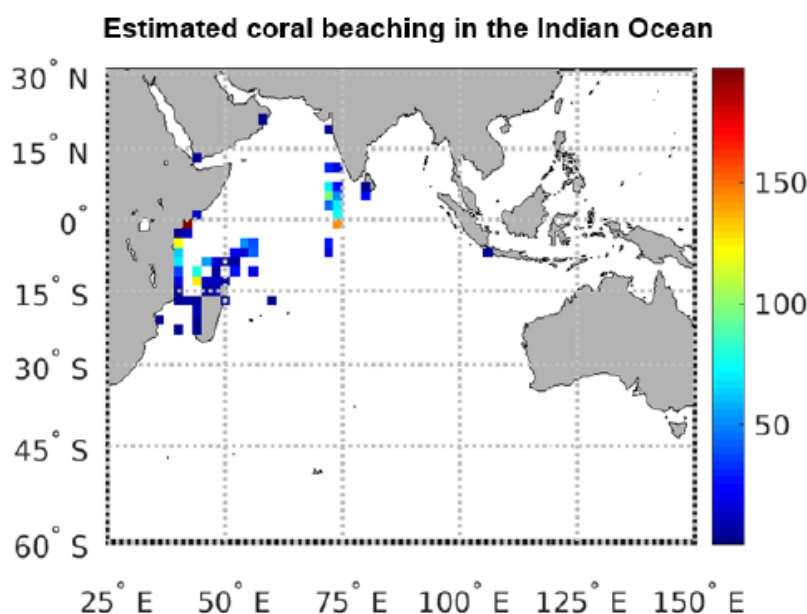


Figure 11. 2016-2023 Beaching for coral reefs every two degrees of latitude and longitude. Source: Uranga et al 2024.

With regard to other FAD-related activities and projects that AGAC is engaged in:

- 1) Sinerxia 2024 reported on the process of replacing non-biodegradable with biodegradable materials in FADs deployed by the AGAC fleet, where the aim of the project has been to replace 20% of the weight of material in the FADs with biodegradable materials by 2023, and 40% by 2024. This project has engaged the entire AGAC fleet operating in the Atlantic, with the report including details of the auditing undertaken to verify material use and FAD construction. The report also includes information collected opportunistically on the state of the biodegradable materials post-deployment. As of October 2024,

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	<p>biodegradable materials were assessed as making up around 67% of the weight of the FADs in the Indian Ocean.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2) AGAC is involved with Bureo, an organisation that recycles fishing nets. Bureo’s mission is to “create a positive solution from disused fishing nets by collaborating with industry and supporting coastal communities”. The report highlights AGAC’s involvement in Bureo’s work in Ecuador, Abidjan and the Seychelles to recycle old fishing nets and reuse them to make new products. As of the report’s publication, over 1,600 t of old net had been collected by Bureo. 3) In 2023, several companies from OPAGAC-AGAC (i.e., Albacora, CTMC, and Inpesca) started to collaborate with Zunibal and AZTI to test a new design of an industrialised floating platform using a compostable bio-based material. Zunibal has developed two prototypes: one as a superficial platform shape and the second one adapted for submerged use, more suitable for the Atlantic and Indian ocean respectively. These designs diminish the number of elements required to construct the FADs, making them easier to recover in the event of loss at sea or stranding. Prototype testing in real conditions, has been initiated with the aim to deploy in total 210 platforms in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans in 2024 and early 2025. 4) AGAC has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (30 April 2024) with the non-profit organisation Oceanika to establish a formal cooperation focused on the access and use of the FADWATCH tool to facilitate and foster the retrieval of abandoned Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) in the Indian Ocean. 5) The third FAD Watch recovery expedition is scheduled to set sail on 25 November 2024 following the Sustainable Indian Ocean Tuna Initiative (SIOTI), the SFA, and the Spanish Association of Tuna Freezers (AGAC) memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed in July 2023. <p>This condition is clearly on target, and additional data and analyses are anticipated in coming years.</p>
Progress status	On target
Carrying over condition	No
To be closed during reassessment or transition assessment	N/A – the Condition is scheduled to be closed in Year 4 of the existing certificate.

Condition 6 – PI 2.5.3 (OPEN)

Performance Indicator	2.5.3 (a). Information is adequate to broadly understand the key elements of the ecosystem.
Score	75

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<p>Justification</p>	<p>Juan Jorda 2019 (IOTC-2019-WPEB15-31) provides a synopsis of the types of key impacts of fishing on the ecosystem function and structure of marine ecosystems in the Indian Ocean, all are assessed under the ecosystem element trophic structure and function and include: Fishing impacts on the individual targeted species and non-targeted species (including ETP species); the impact on habitats of ecological significance.</p> <p>There are no available reliable ecosystem models for the western Indian Ocean that measure the fishing impacts on the ecosystem function and structure, a lack of information on food web interactions and incomplete knowledge relating to the impact of FADs on tuna behaviour. Work conducted by Adonengi et al 2019, Juna Jorda 2019, Juan Jorda et al 2019 and the IOTC WPEB has managed to develop a general profile of the key ecosystem components sufficient to identify key ecosystem elements, however at this stage there is still a poor understanding of the key elements of the ecosystem and how fishing is impacting on them.</p> <p>There has been considerable research examining the effects of FADs on the behaviour and movement patterns of tunas and non-tunas and their consequences on the biology of the species (e.g. growth). More studies are required to understand better the effects of increasing number of FADs and FAD densities on the behaviour, movement patterns of tunas and non-tunas. Ecological impacts of fishery removals on trophic relationships and ecosystem structure and functioning have not been investigated in detail and are poorly understood.</p>
<p>Condition</p>	<p>SI a) By the fourth surveillance audit, demonstrate that information is adequate to broadly understand the key elements of the ecosystem.</p>
<p>Condition start</p>	<p>Initial assessment, July 2022</p>
<p>Condition deadline</p>	<p>4th Surveillance Audit, July 2026</p>
<p>Milestones</p>	<p>Year 1: (Interim score = 75) Review options to develop a reliable western Indian Ocean ecosystem model. Develop research plan.</p> <p>Year 2: (Interim score = 75) Implement research plan.</p> <p>Year 3: (Interim score = 75) Continue research. Preliminary results are discussed as they become available.</p> <p>Year 4: (Expected score = 80) The client fishery demonstrates that a reliable ecosystem model is available to adequately understand the key elements of the ecosystem thus meeting SG80.</p>
<p>Progress on Condition (Year 1)</p>	<p>The research plan to assess the impacts of the purse seine fishery on the western Indian Ocean marine ecosystem has been developed and is already being implemented (Amate et al., 2023). While most of the tasks are ongoing, the progress report was presented at the site visit and reviewed by the assessment team.</p> <p>The project recognizes that the IOTC is yet to adopt concrete management and conservation measures for considering in a more explicit way the impact of fishing on the trophic dynamics that</p>

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	<p>maintain the structure and function of marine ecosystems. The project has in place three specific objectives to address this:</p> <p>To characterize the existing relationships between the different ecosystem components in the tropical Indian ecosystem by analysing the trophic dynamics and the effects of environmental variability in the ecosystem</p> <p>To assess the ecological impacts caused by the extraction of top predators by the fishery operating in the area</p> <p>To assess the ecological impacts of FADs on the dynamics of target species and on the ecosystem as a whole</p> <p>A detailed workplan with defined tasks and deliverables based on the three main objectives of the project has been completed. The study area has been defined based on the main fishing fleets distribution and distribution of catches of tropical tunas. The study area covers the Tropical Indian Ocean (TIO) from the end of the continental shelf to the open ocean (small islands and archipelagos are included).</p> <p>The proposed static Ecopath model for the TIO will be fitted to the available time series of data from 2003-2022 and the same timeframe will be used to fit the dynamic module of EwE Ecosim to model the impact of fishing and environment (i.e., temperature and primary production). Functional groups have been identified for inclusion in the model, though this work is still in progress. Literature reviews on the trophic ecology and biomass, catch and environmental time-series are in progress. Environmental variables must also take account of the large scale warming and cooling events driven by the El Niño/La Niña Southern Oscillation (ENSO) – this has bearing on fish availability through the removal of surface heat, regional upwelling and variability in the depth of the thermocline that make tuna more or less vulnerable to exploitation (Block & Stevens, 2001).</p> <p>Further research has been undertaken specifically investigating the evidence or lack thereof for FADs acting as ecological traps (Dupaix et al. 2023a and 2023b, Navarro-Garcia et al. 2023).</p> <p>Dupaix et al. (2023a) rejected the hypothesis that the body condition of yellowfin tuna decreased concurrently with the increased number of dFADs, thus suggesting the absence of negative long-term impacts of dFADs on the condition of tuna.</p> <p>Dupaix et al. (2023b) predicted that the increase of floating object density strongly increases the percentage of time tuna spend associated, which directly impacts tuna availability to fishers and fishing mortality. This modification of tuna associative behaviour could also have indirect impacts on their fitness, by retaining tuna in areas detrimental to them or disrupting schooling behaviour.</p> <p>However, Navarro-Garcia et al 2023 examined the temporal trends of tuna-school associations with drifting objects both in comparison to previous studies, and in the context of the ‘ecological trap’ theory. They investigated the aggregation time and disaggregation time, which were estimated to obtain further insight into the symmetry of the aggregation process. Across all oceans, the time it took for tuna aggregations to depart from individual dFADs was not significantly longer than the time it took for the aggregations to form. The authors concluded that these results do not align with what would be expected if the association were ‘strong and long-lasting’ as proposed by one of the aspects of the ‘ecological trap’ theory.</p> <p>Whilst it is unlikely that the ‘Ecological trap’ hypothesis can be proved or disproved conclusively, in particular as it incorporates multiple potential discrete effects of tropical tunas, the current body of evidence being collected supports that the main impacts of the potential effects of the ecological trap have been investigated in detail.</p>
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Progress on Condition (Year 2)	<p>The main output presented to the assessment at Year 2 is the development of an Ecopath model of the Tropical Indian Ocean (TIO) pelagic ecosystem (Amate et al 2024). The model represents the pelagic oceanic ecosystem of the early 2000s, covering an area of over 21 million km², from the surface to a depth of 500m. The Ecopath model forms the basis for further analysis to assess the historical dynamics of the ecosystem and the cumulative impacts of fishing and climate change using the temporal module Ecosim.</p> <p>The development of the Ecopath model provides a preliminary characterization of the structure and functioning of the tropical Indian Ocean pelagic ecosystem, determining it to be a chain-like food web, showing high importance of lower trophic level groups and confirming that industrial fishing fleets act as ‘top predators’ through removal of fish biomass with different impacts on the ecosystem.</p> <p>Future steps scheduled for the work recognise the need to improve discards data and apply post-release survival rates for species of special interest and ETPs and to develop the temporal Ecosim module fitted to a time series of data (2003-2022) to support analysis of ecosystem changes under combined scenarios of future fishing and climate change conditions.</p> <p>The Ecopath baseline provides a broad understanding of the key elements of the ecosystem as at 2000-2003. Application of the Ecosim module will provide an updated understanding of the ecosystem at present, noting significant changes to fishing practices since the early 2000s, in particular the shift to fishing predominantly on FADs since around 2008.</p> <p>The adjusted Ecosim model will then be used to assess the historical dynamics of the TIO ecosystem and to evaluate potential fishing and climate change scenarios to understand how key drivers may interact and affect the ecosystem in the future and to analyse plausible conservation and management options that have the potential to meet preferred fishery and conservation objectives.</p> <p>The ultimate goal is to identify management measures that have the potential to ensure fishing yields while maintaining good ecosystem status under a global change context.</p> <p>Progress with this condition is considered On Target at the Year 2 surveillance.</p>
Progress status	On target
Carrying over condition	No
To be closed during reassessment or transition assessment	N/A – the Condition is scheduled to be closed in Year 4 of the existing certificate.

Condition 7 – PI 3.2.2 (OPEN)

Performance Indicator	3.2.2 (b). Decision-making processes
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Score	75
Justification	<p>There is a total catch limit for skipjack derived from the HCR (Res. 16/02, see Scoring table 3. PI 1.2.1 – Harvest strategy) and fixed according to the recommendation of the Scientific Committee (SC) and communicated to all CPCs in December 2017 for the year 2018. However, the catch limit set exceeded by 30% in 2018, and by 16% in 2019. In 2020, the new skipjack stock assessment found the stock biomass in a good state, and the Scientific Committee noted that “the recent catches that exceeded the (previously-set) limits established for the period 2018-2020, could have been sustained by favourable environmental conditions”. These catch overages are considered an important rather than a serious issue. However, the SC concluded that “the Commission needs to ensure that catches of skipjack tuna during this period (2021 – 2023) do not exceed the agreed limit” (IOTC, 2020). Until this is done, for example through the implementation of a CPC catch allocation key, the IOTC decision-making processes do not respond to this other important issue. Further, not all issues are dealt with in a timely manner. Coastal states and the developing countries in particular often have limited capacity and financial resources to attend commission meetings as well as meetings of the SC and other technical meetings is often limited (Medley et al. 2019). While for the EU and Seychelles, resources are available, effective implementation and decision-making by all parties on all issues is not always achieved. SG80 is not met.</p>
Condition	<p>By the end of Year 5, demonstrate that at IOTC level, decision-making processes respond to serious and other important issues identified in relevant research, monitoring, evaluation and consultation (specifically to skipjack catches in excess of the annual catch limit corresponding to the HCR) in a transparent, timely and adaptive manner and take account of the wider implications of decisions</p>
Condition start	Initial assessment, July 2022
Condition deadline	5 th Surveillance Audit, July 2027
Milestones	<p>Year 1 to 4: (Interim score = 75)</p> <p>Some evidence that the Commission is responding to the issue of total catches in excess of the agreed Catch Limit for SKJ, by progressing with the harvest strategy, as per Condition 1 or some other evidence.</p> <p>Year 5: (Expected score = 80)</p> <p>Provide evidence that regarding the skipjack stock management, IOTC decision-making processes have responded to the possibility of catches in excess of the set total annual catch by implementing the harvest strategy set out in Resolution 16/02 and in Condition 1, or by some other suitable means.</p>
Progress on Condition (Year 1)	<p>There are three other fisheries in the region with a similar condition, including ANABAC (in recertification undergoing objection) and just completed SA4.</p> <p>In the case of the Echebatar purse seine fishery, which was recertified in 2023, this condition on previous certification was harmonised (new timeline) with conditions under milestones for 1.2.1 and 1.2.2 conditions. This condition for Echebatar therefore is still in place and is on target. For the CFTO purse seine fishery, certified in 2021, after their 1st SA in January 2023, this condition</p>

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	<p>was also deemed on target. In the case of the ANABAC purse seine fishery, it has a similar condition under this PI (3.2.2b), but is subject to an objection at this stage. Further one new fishery (Dong Wong purse seine) is under assessment (post ACDR) and has not yet set any conditions.</p> <p>In summary 3.2.2b remains open for all fisheries no matter at what stage of certification they are in. Fundamentally, the reason for the condition remains, that is the “IOTC decision-making processes have responded to the possibility of catches in excess of the set total annual catch by implementing the harvest strategy set out in Resolution 16/02 and in Condition 1, or by some other suitable means.</p> <p>The Year 1 milestone requires “Some evidence that the Commission is responding to the issue of total catches in excess of the agreed Catch Limit for SKJ, by progressing with the harvest strategy, as per Condition 1 or some other evidence.</p> <p>The team noted that SKJ catches remain over the recommended catch limit set (scientific advice). In a note to the IOTC the EU points out that for skipjack tuna, the catch limit calculated applying the Harvest Control Rule specified in Resolution 16/02 is 513,572 t/year for the period 2021-2023, while the total catch in 2021 was 27% higher (IOTC-2023-S27-PropB[E]) and in 2022 was 30% higher (Table 3).</p> <p>The AGAC client action plan included working with the CPCs (EU and the Seychelles) to promote the implementation of measures to ensure that the catch limit of skipjack tuna is not exceeded. AGAC presented information that they had engaged at the highest level through the Européche Tuna Group and submitted a position paper to the 27th Session of the IOTC Commission asking for greater compliance of IOTC members (all gears) to implement the measures in place for SKJ and all tropical tuna. This included active participation at the scientific committee (SRC) working towards improved management of stocks managed by the IOTC. On site visit the team confirmed AGACs continued engagement and support to the IOTC as well as with the Seychelles Fisheries Authority (SFA – new CEO Jan Robinson refers) as well other groups such as SIOTI (FADs) and TNC (Marine Spatial Planning). AGAC also met with the EU fisheries (DG Mare) in January 2023 that included delegates from Indian Ocean coastal states. The team noted the issues between EU parties and coastal states and recognised the effort of CPCs in making Recommendation 23/11 aimed at “enhancing cooperation in the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission Decision-Making process”. While not directly relevant to the Condition it demonstrates the seriousness of the allocation process being undertaken by the Technical Committee on Allocation Criteria (TCAC) (see: IOTC-2019-TCAC05-02_Rev5 to enhance cooperation in the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission decision-making process).</p> <p>Further AGAC also supported the development of a new resolution (IOTC-2023-S27-PropB[E]) on “ a multi-annual conservation and management plan for tropical tunas, including for SKJ with the objective “to establish an integrated fisheries management framework able to curb and maintain the fishing mortalities at sustainable levels, in order to recover and/or maintain the IOTC tropical tuna (yellowfin tuna, bigeye tuna and skipjack tuna) population at levels not less than those capable of producing maximum sustainable yield (MSY) with a probability equal to or greater than 60% by 2034-2038 at latest.</p> <p>Overall, the assessment team were satisfied that the above was evidence that AGAC had met the Year 1 milestone for this condition.</p>
<p>Progress on Condition (Year 2)</p>	<p>There are four other fisheries in the region with a similar condition relating to the UoA (skipjack) specifically (ANABAC, CFTO, Maldives and Echebastar). The CFTO fishery was recertified in April 2024, ANABAC in February 2024, Echebastar (after objection) in July 2024 and Maldives in May 2023. Each fishery has a similar Condition relating to Decision Making for Skipjack. The Maldives 1st SA in 2024 determined the fishery was on target and the other fisheries must still undertake</p>

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	<p>their 1st audits since recertification. For this fishery Milestone 1 was met in 2023 SA1. One other fishery has withdrawn from MSC certification (Dongwon).</p> <p>In summary, the Condition on PI 3.2.2 Slb remains open for all fisheries no matter at what stage of certification they are in. The reason for the condition remains, that is the “IOTC decision-making processes have responded to the possibility of catches in excess of the set total annual catch by implementing the harvest strategy set out in Resolution 16/02 and in Condition 1, or by some other suitable means.</p> <p>The Year 1 milestone required “Some evidence that the Commission is responding to the issue of total catches in excess of the agreed Catch Limit for SKJ, by progressing with the harvest strategy, as per Condition 1 or some other evidence.</p> <p>For the reasons provided in SA1 of this fishery, the 1st milestone was met.</p> <p>For this audit, the milestone (2) remains the same.</p> <p>The client provided evidence of their continued engagement with the IOTC to address the skipjack over catch. The AGAC client action plan included working with the CPCs (EU and the Seychelles) to promote the implementation of measures to ensure that the catch limit of skipjack tuna is not exceeded.</p> <p>There is in place a new management procedure for skipjack (IOTC Resolution 24/07), and IOTC Circular 2024-11 noted that:</p> <p><i>“Under IOTC Resolution 21/03 On harvest control rules for skipjack tuna in the IOTC Area of Competence, the Commission adopted the use of a pre-agreed harvest control rule (HCR) to maintain the skipjack tuna stock at, or above, the target reference point, and well above the limit reference point”. A new IOTC skipjack assessment was more optimistic than previously and resulted in a higher annual catch limit of 628,606 t calculated by applying the HCR, for 2024 to 2026.</i></p> <p>AGAC again presented information that they had engaged at the highest level through the Européche Tuna Group (ETG) and again submitted a position paper to the 28th Session of the IOTC Commission asking for CPCs to cooperate and adopt catch limits for the effective management of the tropical tuna species including for ensuring skipjack catches do not exceed the limit set by Harvest Control Rule (HCR) in Resolution 21/03 and adopting a comprehensive Management Procedure for skipjack tuna by 2025. The client remains actively engaged in the Scientific Committee (SRC) working towards improved management of stocks managed by the IOTC (confirmed on site visit). One other organisation through which the client indirectly engages with IOTC and other parties is the Long Distance Advisory Committee (LDAC). In its Recommendations for IOTC at the 28th IOTC Commission meeting held in Bangkok in May 2024 (LDAC Ref. R-15-23/WG1), decision making by IOTC was specifically addressed viz.</p> <p><i>“The effectiveness of the decision-making procedure in RFMOs relies on limiting risks of blocking or opting-out behaviours, a transparent objection procedure and a timely dispute resolution process must be considered like in other RFMOs such as SPRFMO and ICCAT to some extent.”</i></p> <p>In regards also to Yellowfin Tuna, AGAC continues to engage at IOTC to push for the recovery of the stock and for all CPCs to abide by the TACs as set by IOTC.</p> <p>Overall, the assessment team were satisfied that the above was evidence that AGAC had met the Year 2 milestone for this condition.</p>
<p>Progress status</p>	<p>On target</p>

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Carrying over condition	No
To be closed during reassessment or transition assessment	The Condition is scheduled to be closed during reassessment. It is anticipated that there will be a specific audit undertaken to determine if the condition is met, although the current certificate is at the Year 2 audit stage, only, and so there are still several years to run before contemplating reassessment.

Condition 8 – PI 3.2.3 (OPEN)

Performance Indicator	3.2.3. Compliance and enforcement - SI(d) Systematic Non-Compliance
Score	75
Justification	<p>For fishing vessels, in particular purse seiners, operating in the Indian Ocean, there is evidence that there are clear and genuine concerns for a vessel and its crew’s safety and security through the public display of AIS tracking information. In the case of the AGAC vessels operating in the Indian Ocean there is evidence that the AIS on the EU component of the AGAC fleet is reporting irregularly or is not providing positional information for extended periods. The CAB considers that the primary reason for this is to limit the risk posed to vessels and crew from piracy.</p> <p>Alternate reasons for this low level of reporting (such as for commercial advantage) has been suggested, although the CAB has reviewed the evidence and it is now understood that AIS is not switched ‘off’ but is systematically set on ‘silent’ or ‘low power’ modes so as prevent (blind mode/silent mode) or reduce the potential, but not eliminate (low power/tanker mode, in particular in the absence of the long-range AIS broadcast function) the AIS from connecting to satellites and coastal receiver stations that would allow the vessels’ positions to be mapped on publicly accessible websites, while still maintaining some AIS functionality.</p> <p>There may be some, very limited potential for gaining a commercial advantage through turning AIS ‘off’ or operating AIS in ‘silent mode’ or ‘low power’ mode. However, all normal communications systems between vessels in the area are maintained. Further all vessels navigation and safety tools are in place (including VMS, which is designed to be tamper proof and reports the vessels’ positions regularly), and crew safety is considered to be maintained at all times.</p> <p>There is however no contemporaneous record or evidence through vessel logbooks or other documented means to record the reason (piracy or other) for the poor reporting of the AIS on some or all of the AGAC vessels in the Indian Ocean.</p> <p>In the case of the European Union flags of the AGAC fleet in the Indian Ocean, the switching off of AIS is not permitted in terms of EU Directive 2002/59/EC (as amended) and Council Regulation (EC) No 1224/2009. Whilst the risk of collision in the Indian Ocean is low, it is still a requirement of EU legislation for EU fishing vessels >15metres to operate AIS, including in compliance with Article 6A of 2002/59/EC.</p> <p>Safety obligations to comply with SOLAS are also included within Seychelles legislation in the Merchant Shipping Act 1995, consolidated chapter 127A, applying to all “Safety Convention ships”, being all vessels which fall within SOLAS (i.e., principally >300 grt on international</p>

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	<p>voyages) whose Governments have acceded to SOLAS. Although the Seychelles Merchant Shipping Act does not specify AIS (or AIS in relation to a fishing policy, as in EU Regulation 1224/2009) it imposes an obligation to comply with a requirement of what it describes as “the Safety Convention”.</p> <p>In the absence of clear evidence recording the reason(s) for the decision(s) to either turn AIS off or on or to set it in an alternative power state, it is unclear if this practice by AGAC vessels operating in the Indian Ocean is systematic and for reason other than the purpose it was intended. It cannot therefore be determined if this practice is systematic or not. SG 80 is therefore not met and a condition is needed.</p>
Condition	(Sld) By the fourth surveillance audit, demonstrate that “There is no evidence of systematic non-compliance.”
Condition start	Initial assessment, July 2022
Condition deadline	4 th Surveillance Audit, July 2026
Milestones	<p>Year 1: (Interim score = 75)</p> <p>Provide evidence that vessels have maintained VMS coverage in a manner that is compliant with operational requirements. Also, the client is to present a plan that is designed to demonstrate AGAC vessel use of AIS is compliant with relevant operational requirements, including, where appropriate, by taking account of ‘exceptional circumstances’ for not maintaining an operational AIS.</p> <p>Year 2: (Interim score = 75)</p> <p>Provide evidence that vessels have maintained VMS and AIS coverage in a manner that is compliant with relevant operational requirements. With regards to AIS use, this will include taking account of ‘exceptional circumstances’. The client to provide evidence that the plan to demonstrate AGAC vessel use of AIS is compliant with operational requirements is in place.</p> <p>Year 3: (Interim score = 75)</p> <p>Provide evidence that vessels have maintained VMS and AIS coverage in a manner that is compliant with operational requirements. With regards to AIS use, this will include taking account of ‘exceptional circumstances’. The client to provide evidence that the plan to demonstrate AGAC vessel use of AIS is compliant with operational requirements is collecting data as required.</p> <p>Year 4: (Expected score = 80)</p> <p>Provide evidence that there is no systematic non-compliance with respect to the AGAC fleets use of VMS and AIS.</p>
Progress on Condition	<p>AGAC submitted a comprehensive set of data for all vessels showing compliance with their VMS systems (most have multiple systems). These data show that the fleet (including one vessel that has changed flag) maintained reporting and fished either in the high seas or in the EEZs of the countries with which the AGAC group of vessels have fisheries agreements. The team on site visits also had an opportunity to visit a client vessel in port and was given a demonstration of the multiple monitoring systems on board that included INMARSAT and CLS. In addition, the AIS reporting unit was also demonstrated along with the VMS and FAD tracking systems on board the purse seiner <i>FV Galerna III</i> (Fig below) with the Fishing Master and Skippers.</p>

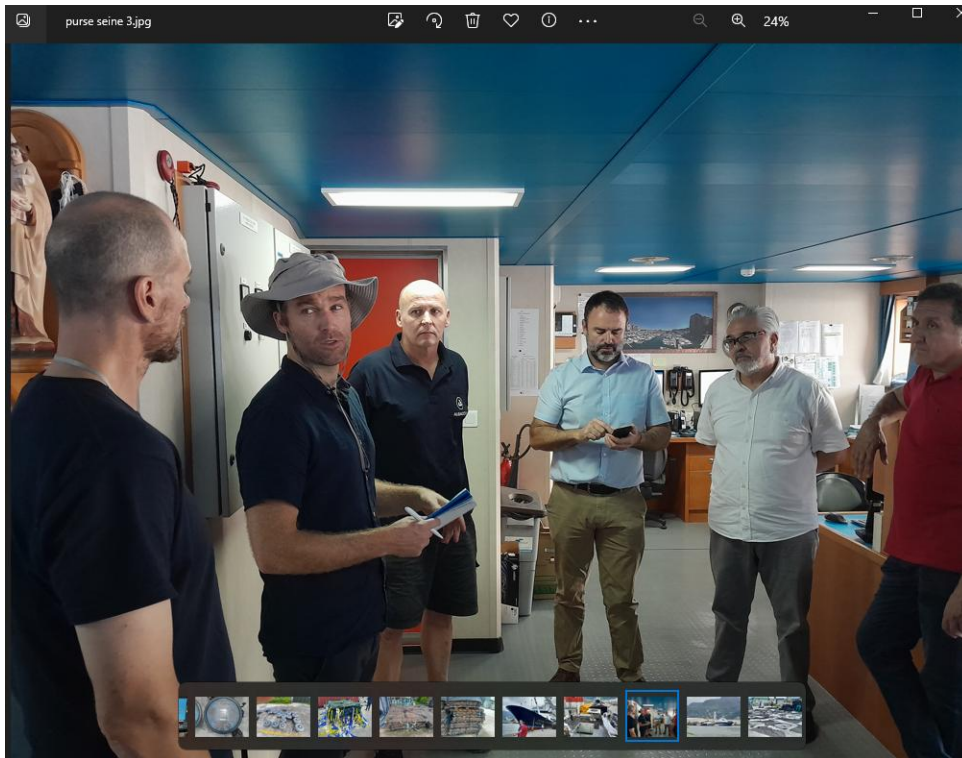
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Vessels have multiple VMS, to be able to comply with both flag state and every jurisdiction of operation. As such, the fleet will maintain its modus operandi, and present the reports issued by the corresponding FMCs. AGAC vessels record AIS and when it is on or off or if powered down when piracy risk increases (see doc below).

Vessel: *Galerna III*

AIS status	From: day (dd:mm:yyyy) and time UTC (hh:mm)	To: day (dd:mm:yyyy) and time UTC (hh:mm)	Reason	Obsen
OFF	17/03/2022 ; 06:40	17/04/2022 ; 00:10	piracy risk	
OFF	01/05/2022 ; 04:00	13/06/2022 ; 01:00	piracy risk	
OFF	12/07/2022 ; 10:00	22/07/2022 ; 07:45	piracy risk	
OFF	24/07/2022 ; 18:35	17/08/2022 ; 08:30	piracy risk	
OFF	24/08/2022 ; 22:00	13/09/2022 ; 20:00	piracy risk	
OFF	22/09/2022 ; 06:00	14/10/2022 ; 20:00	piracy risk	
OFF	21/10/2022 ; 12:40	02/11/2022 ; 02:30	piracy risk	
OFF	28/12/2022 ; 04:35	24/01/2023 ; 02:30	piracy risk	
OFF	29/01/2023 ; 11:00	22/02/2023 ; 01:50	piracy risk	
OFF	01/01/2023 ; 09:55	09/03/2023 ; 14:05	piracy risk	
OFF	09/03/2023 ; 14:25	13/03/2023 ; 08:45	piracy risk	
OFF	13/03/2023 ; 20:40	15/03/2023 ; 08:50	piracy risk	
OFF	15/03/2023 ; 19:05	22/03/2023 ; 13:45	piracy risk	
OFF	23/03/2023 ; 01:05	27/03/2023 ; 07:10	piracy risk	
OFF	27/03/2023 ; 19:10	30/03/2023 ; 04:20	piracy risk	
OFF	30/03/2023 ; 14:35	03/04/2023 ; 02:30	piracy risk	
OFF	10/04/2023 ; 10:45	13/04/2023 ; 09:17	piracy risk	
OFF	13/04/2023 ; 20:55	01/05/2023 ; 04:00	piracy risk	
OFF	08/05/2023 ; 06:25	08/06/2023 ; 12:00	piracy risk	
OFF	15/06/2023 ; 08:00			



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	VESSEL : ALBACAN		AIS REGISTRATION	
	DATE	SWITCH ON/OFF	TIME UTC	OBSERVATIONS
	2022/07/19	SWITCHED ON	8:00	The ship is going to port.
	2022/07/20	SWITCHED ON	8:00	The vessel is in Port Victoria, Mahe (Seychelles).
	2022/07/26	SWITCHED ON	12:35	The vessel leaves from Port Victoria.
	2022/07/27	SWITCHED OFF	10:50	Due to piracy reasons, de AIS is turned off.
	2022/08/18	SWITCHED ON	3:50	The ship is going to port.
	2022/08/19	SWITCHED ON	4:00	The vessel is in Port Victoria, Mahe (Seychelles).
	2022/08/31	SWITCHED ON	12:40	The vessel leaves from Port Victoria.
	2022/09/01	SWITCHED OFF	10:45	Due to piracy reasons, de AIS is turned off.
	2022/09/07	SWITCHED ON	12:00	The ship is going to port.
	2022/09/08	SWITCHED ON	5:00	The vessel is in Port Victoria, Mahe (Seychelles).
	2022/10/05	SWITCHED ON	6:45	The vessel leaves from Port Victoria.
	2022/10/06	SWITCHED OFF	6:45	Due to piracy reasons, de AIS is turned off.
	2022/10/20	SWITCHED ON	4:00	The ship is going to port.

The team also visited the SFA (Seychelles vessels) Compliance / Monitoring unit and were demonstrated the VMS unit, vessel tracks and also the Electronic Monitoring.

In terms of “exceptional circumstances” this was discussed openly with the vessel skipper – it was clear that piracy was still considered a risk and as shown in the extract above for the FV Galerna III and FV Albacan, the AIS units are powered down allowing line of sight vessel observations (VHF range) but excluding satellite transmissions that expose vessel locations through the internet.

All AGAC vessels under Spanish Flag must also have VMS installations approved by the Spanish Ministry of Fisheries (see supporting information in Para 5.2) and have designated AIS requirements in the fleet management Plans (see Annex 3 in para 5.2 in the appendices).

Overall the team were satisfied that the Milestone for this condition was met.

Progress on Condition (Year 2)	On SA2 the team confirmed that all vessels continue to use VMS 100% for tracking their operations in IOTC area (data provided). Refer also to Table 19, Table 20, Table 21 and Figure 12 of the Year 2 audit report). In addition, agreements with coastal and other states remain in place with some minor revisions and a new agreement with Kenya (Table 22). The utilisation of AIS was discussed at site visit – as in SA1 the vessels continue to maintain AIS records electronically. The assessment team requested that records of AIS be maintained in logbooks as well or through an alternate electronic system for ease of auditing. It was also noted that the risk of piracy remained in the region, and for this reason records of when the AIS was active was dependent on AIS settings (e.g., low power). The Assessment Team noted that the vessel Albatun Dos had to activate the pirate sighting protocol, as it was approached by an unidentified skiff in the Indian Ocean on 31/01/2024 (Seychelles News Agency article).
Progress status	On target
Carrying over condition	No

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To be closed during reassessment or transition assessment	N/A – the Condition is scheduled to be closed in Year 4 of the existing certificate.
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8.5.3. New conditions

At completion of the scope extension of the AGAC IO Fishery, a new condition (Condition 9) is set against the new IO YFT UoC.

Additionally, non-binding Condition #4 from the original assessment (Akroyd et al. 2022) is raised to become new binding Condition 10 on PI 2.1.2. This non-binding condition was set originally against UoA 4 (YFT) because BET and SKJ as main primary species for UoA 4 were deemed not to be meeting the SG80 requirements. It is noted that BET is now meeting the SG80 requirements (confirmed with the closure of Condition #3 at the Year 2 surveillance audit – Blyth-Skyrme et al. 2024), so new Condition 10 is raised only against SKJ as the other main primary species for UoA 4.

Condition 9 – (New) YFT PI 1.2.2 (OPEN)

Performance Indicator	1.2.2 – Sla, Slb and Slc
Score	60
Justification	<p>Sla: Resolution 15/10 presented a set of rules that define actions depending on stock status relative to reference points. The statements in the rules aim to respond to the status assessed with the purpose of maintaining abundance and fishing pressure within the boundaries defined by the reference points. According to the definitions in the preceding paragraph, the harvest control rules as presented in Resolution 15/10 are considered a set of pre-agreed rules that allow the fishery to respond to changes perceived in stock assessments and define actions to be taken if the reference points are exceeded, and in general to maintain or restore abundance at the level producing MSY or above. Nevertheless, the reference points are presented as a function of B_0 instead of B_{MSY} after consideration that MSY-based reference points “cannot be robustly estimated”, the proposed reference points were expected to be revised in 2018 but the team did not received information about that revision, therefore they remain interim. By implication, the main elements of the HCR are preliminary in nature, and although considered precautionary, are still a basic set of procedures that have been active without revision since 2015. These procedures are presented as guidelines with general responses to stock status as presented in Kobe plots (see background section on HCR). The HCR is therefore considered to be generally understood (and in place) but not “well-defined”.</p> <p>Slb: The MSC Guidance to the Fisheries Certification Requirements (GSA2.5.2-2.5.5 in relation to Scoring Issue b – Scoring uncertainty in the HCRs) requires assessment teams to consider cases where an HCR “has not been fully agreed by stakeholders, and it is uncertain whether the fishing community will comply with the HCR. This last issue is important to ensure HCRs are not only theoretical rules on paper, but are actually applied in practice”. The assessment team determined that this is a main uncertainty for IO YFT given that some CPCs have not adopted relevant Resolutions that are intended to control fishing pressure and ensure that management objectives</p>

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	<p>can be met. In this regard, the assessment team is not satisfied that there is evidence that the HCRs are applied in practice.</p> <p>Slc: The overall effect of resolutions 12/01 and 15/10, 19/01 and 21/01 is to provide interim elements of the harvest strategy that are intended to ensure that the stock is maintained around the target reference points (B_{MSY} and F_{MSY}), implying the intention of resolutions 12/01, 15/10, 19/01 and 21/01 is to be consistent with appropriate management. Resolution 15/10 (IOTC 2015a) has set interim target (B_{MSY} and F_{MSY}) and limit ($B_{LIM} = 0.40 B_{MSY}$ and $F_{LIM} = 1.40 F_{MSY}$) reference points for YFT and 19/01 and 21/01 (IOTC, 2024d) determine the cuts of catches of the 2014 (or other alternative time-period, where applicable) reference catch level. Theoretically the harvest control rule is appropriate and effective in controlling exploitation. The results of the 2024 assessment are encouraging in presenting some evidence that the tools are effective in controlling exploitation, but currently not clearly at levels required under the HCRs.</p>
Condition	<p>By Year 2 of a new certificate for the AGAC IO Fishery (2029), provide evidence that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sla: Well defined HCRs are in place that ensure that the exploitation rate is reduced as the PRI is approached, are expected to keep the stock fluctuating around a target level consistent with (or above) MSY. • Slb: The HCRs are likely to be robust to the main uncertainties. • Slc: Available evidence indicates that the tools in use are appropriate and effective in achieving the exploitation levels required under the HCRs
Condition start	Upon certification of the IO YFT UoC
Condition deadline	Year 2 of a new certificate for the AGAC IO Fishery (2029)
Exceptional circumstances	No. The timeline for the condition will extend beyond the existing AGAC certificate (due to end July 2027), but the IO YFT UoA is a scope extension of the existing AGAC IO Fishery, and the timeline would therefore extend for less than one certification period (4 years), only. See MSC interpretation INT-0064 .
Milestones	<p>Based on the latest IOTC Scientific Committee workplan and IOTC stock assessment schedule, the following milestones are set:</p> <p><u>Year 4 (2026 audit): Score = 60</u></p> <p>Provide evidence that AGAC has advocated for the adoption of well-defined HCRs that ensure that the exploitation rate is reduced as the PRI is approached and are expected to keep the stock fluctuating around a target level consistent with (or above) MSY, and which are likely to be robust to the main uncertainties.</p> <p><u>Year 5/Year 0 (2027): Score = 60</u></p> <p>Provide evidence that AGAC has advocated for the adoption of well-defined HCRs that ensure that the exploitation rate is reduced as the PRI is approached and are expected to keep the stock fluctuating around a target level consistent with (or above) MSY, and which are likely to be robust to the main uncertainties.</p> <p><u>Year 1 of new certificate (2028): Score = 75</u></p>

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	<p>Provide evidence that well-defined HCRs have been adopted that ensure that the exploitation rate is reduced as the PRI is approached and are expected to keep the stock fluctuating around a target level consistent with (or above) MSY, and which are likely to be robust to the main uncertainties (SIa and SIb met).</p> <p><u>Year 2 of new certificate (2029): Score ≥ 80</u></p> <p>Demonstrate that available evidence indicates that the tools in use are appropriate and effective in achieving the exploitation levels required under the HCRs (SIc met).</p>
Verification with other entities	The Management Strategy Evaluation process is underway at the IOTC, and verification with the IOTC is not required.
Complete the following rows for reassessments and/or transition assessments.	
Carried over condition	N/A
Related condition	N/A
Condition rewritten	N/A

Condition 10 – (New) YFT PI 2.1.2 (OPEN – originally non-binding Condition #4)

Performance Indicator	Primary species management strategy 2.1.2 c – Management strategy implementation
Score	75
Justification	<p>For the AGAC IO Tuna Fishery, SA 3.1.3.1 (MSC 2018a) requires that bigeye tuna (BET) and skipjack tuna (SKJ) are assessed as main primary species in scoring UoA 4 (yellowfin tuna).</p> <p>It is noted that in the original assessment of the AGAC IO fishery (Akroyd et al. 2022), BET scored 60 for PI 2.1.2. However, scores for PI 2.1.2 SIa, SIb and SIc were raised to 80 in meeting Condition 3 (set against UoA 6 – SKJ) at the Year 2 Surveillance Audit (Blyth-Skyrme et al. 2024). BET is also a main primary species for UoA 4 – YFT, and also now scores 80 for PI 2.1.2. As such, the original non-binding condition is modified to reflect that only SKJ as a main retained species scores <80. In this regard, only SIc was deemed not to be meeting SG80, thus requiring a condition to be set on PI 2.1.2 SIc, only.</p> <p>Skipjack tuna</p> <p><u>Skipjack tuna</u></p> <p>Based on the results of the stock assessment of skipjack tuna in 2017, the Commission, following Resolution 16/02, adopted an annual catch limit of 470,029 tonnes for the years 2018 to 2020. However, total catches in 2018 (607,701t) were about 30% higher than the catch limit generated</p>

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	<p>by the Harvest Control Rule (470,029 t, which applies to the years 2018–2020), and there has been an increasing trend in catches over the past 4 years, including a sudden increase in catches in 2018 (compared to 2017, by over 20% or around 100,000 t). IOTC data then shows a decline of 10 percent for the skipjack tuna catches since 2018 – the catch was 547,248 t in 2019 which is still higher than the catch for the HCR. Catch statistics reported by the UoA vessels indicate an increasing trend in catch of skipjack tuna since 2014 (Table 2.1.2-10).</p> <p>Table 2.1.2-10: Skipjack tuna catch by the UoA vessels fishing for AGAC in the Indian Ocean highlighting the increasing trend in catches since 2014.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>Skipjack (t)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2014</td> <td>57 927</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2015</td> <td>51 843</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2016</td> <td>81 151</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2017</td> <td>102 585</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2018</td> <td>134 554</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2019</td> <td>118 819</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>The available evidence suggests that the catch limits set out under the HCR (i.e. the main tool to implement the HCR) may not be able to control catches to the level required by the HCR. IOTC has not as yet been able to manage the catches according to the HCR, therefore there is not evidence that the harvest strategy is being implemented successfully.</p>	Year	Skipjack (t)	2014	57 927	2015	51 843	2016	81 151	2017	102 585	2018	134 554	2019	118 819
Year	Skipjack (t)														
2014	57 927														
2015	51 843														
2016	81 151														
2017	102 585														
2018	134 554														
2019	118 819														
Condition	SI c) By Year 4 of the current certificate of the AGAC IO Fishery (2026), demonstrate there is some evidence that the measures/partial strategy (for SKJ) is being implemented successfully.														
Milestones	<p><u>Year 3 (2025 audit):</u> Score = 75</p> <p>If AGAC IO YFT (UoA 4) is certified, it is expected that the new certificate would be issued after the fishery anniversary (July 2025). As such, there is no Year 3 milestone set. No change in score.</p> <p><u>Year 4 (2026 audit):</u> Score = ≥80</p> <p>Evidence is provided to demonstrate there is some evidence that the measures/partial strategy (for SKJ) is being implemented successfully, so meeting SG80.</p>														
Verification with other entities	The Management Strategy Evaluation process is underway at the IOTC, and verification with the IOTC is not required.														
Complete the following rows for reassessments and/or transition assessments.															
Carried over condition	N/A														
Related condition	N/A														

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Condition rewritten	Yes – this condition was originally set as non-binding condition #4 when the AGAC IO fishery (SKJ) was certified. At that time, neither BET nor SKJ as main retained species met SG80 for all scoring issues of PI 2.1.2. However, BET now meets SG80 (confirmed in closing Condition at the Year 2 Surveillance Audit – Blyth-Skyrme et al. 2024), so the condition is now set against SKJ, only.
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8.6. Client Action Plan

The client provided the following action plan for Condition 9. No action plan is needed for Condition 10, as the actions required replicate those required for condition 1 and 2 (set against the certified IO SKJ – UoA 6).

Table 26: Client action plan for new Condition 9.

Summary of action plan			
AGAC commits to presenting evidence to the CAB that demonstrates that the harvest strategy is achieving stock management objectives. AGAC will work with several entities and evidence will be presented on a yearly basis, in order to allow any update on the action plan. Moreover, AGAC will monitor IOTC catch data for its vessels to ensure that catches of yellowfin tuna are maintained below catch limits, and total catches of yellowfin tuna in the Indian Ocean remain under the recommended levels.			
Milestone	Action	Roles Responsibilities &	Outputs
Year 4 (2026 audit): Provide evidence that AGAC has advocated for the adoption of well-defined HCRs that ensure that the exploitation rate is reduced as the PRI is approached and are expected to keep the stock fluctuating around a target level consistent with (or above) MSY, and which are likely to be robust to the main uncertainties.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> AGAC will keep contributing to the MSE process; AGAC will engage with other stakeholders to promote the adoption of management objectives and HCRs; AGAC will keep supporting this process and attending it meetings/working groups; AGAC will endorse work on the identification of alternative abundance indices from fisheries in the Indian Ocean. AGAC will monitor reports of its companies' flag states to IOTC regarding catches of tropical tunas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lead – AGAC Work on MSE and adoption of a HS for the YFT: ETG-University of Washington Work on alternative indices: AZTI-IRD-University of Washington Monitoring of AGAC Catch: AGAC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> e-mails, minutes of meetings / events held for this purpose (points 1 and 2) Reports from IOTC Any reports derived from this work
Year 5/Year 0 (2027): Provide evidence that AGAC has advocated for the adoption of well-defined HCRs that ensure that the exploitation rate is reduced as the PRI is	As above	As above	As above

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<p>approached and are expected to keep the stock fluctuating around a target level consistent with (or above) MSY, and which are likely to be robust to the main uncertainties.</p>			
<p>Year 1 of new certificate (2028): Provide evidence that AGAC has advocated for the adoption of well-defined HCRs that ensure that the exploitation rate is reduced as the PRI is approached and are expected to keep the stock fluctuating around a target level consistent with (or above) MSY, and which are likely to be robust to the main uncertainties.</p>	<p>As above</p>	<p>As above</p>	<p>As above</p>
<p>Year 2 of new certificate (2029): Provide evidence that well-defined HCRs have been adopted that ensure that the exploitation rate is reduced as the PRI is approached and are expected to keep the stock fluctuating around a target level consistent with (or above) MSY, and which are likely to be robust to the main uncertainties (SIa and SIb met).</p>	<p>As above</p>	<p>As above</p>	<p>Adoption of HCR or a HS on YFT by the IOTC</p>
<p>Consultation on condition</p>	<p>AGAC operators have been consulted and are committed to support the MSE process and the adoption of HCRs and are confident it will be achievable in the specified timeframe.</p> <p>OPAGAC (which is incorporated in AGAC) is a member of the LDAC, which is a key forum that ensures industry representation at the EU and IOTC level.</p> <p>AGAC, as part of the Européche Tuna Group (ETG) receives the support of the University of Washington in matters related to RFMO Science, through the participation of scientists to RFMO science processes, in particular MSE and the adoption of Harvest Strategies for tropical tunas.</p> <p>The General Fisheries Secretariat in the Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food of Spain, the Seychelles Fishing Authority, Mauritius, and Kenya also support this activity (please see its letters of support).</p> <p>AGAC will also work with SIOTI to deliver the necessary changes to the overall management of tropical tuna stocks in the Indian Ocean (please see SIOTI FIP letter of support).</p>		

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8.7. Surveillance

The following surveillance schedule was established at certification, and there are no changes at this scope extension assessment.

Table 27: Fishery surveillance program

Surveillance level	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Level 6	On-site surveillance audit	On-site surveillance audit	On-site surveillance audit	On-site surveillance audit and re-assessment site visit

Table 28: Timing of surveillance audit

Year	Anniversary date of certificate	Proposed date of surveillance audit	Justification
3	July 2022	Oct 2025	Audit timing for the AGAC AO and IO fisheries is combined to enable efficiencies. Timing in October enables the audit to be scheduled in a gap between important RFMO meetings.

Table 29: Surveillance level justification

Year	Surveillance activity	Number of auditors	Justification
1-4	On-site surveillance audit	Three auditors on-site (unless due to logistics travel is not possible for any auditor)	The scale and complexity of the fishery, the conditions on all three Principles and the initial audit being undertaken remotely are all reasons for an on-site audit process.

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8.8. Harmonised fishery assessments

For this yellowfin tuna (UoA 4) scope extension of the AGAC IO Fishery, it is only Principle 1 (P1) that is being scored. When the scope extension was announced there are no other UoAs that target IO yellowfin tuna as a P1 species, and therefore there was no consideration of harmonisation for P1. There are harmonisation considerations for P2 and P3 where the AGAC fishery overlaps with other UoAs, but these are the same as for the existing, certified AGAC IO fishery. At the site visit, however, LRQA was informed that the Dongwon Indian Ocean Purse Seine Fishery was due to announce and we subsequently arranged a harmonisation meeting with the team responsible for that assessment, as below.

Supporting information for the harmonisation process is presented in Table 30. Fisheries that are relevant to harmonisation are detailed in Table 31. Scoring of P2 and P3 is not considered in this Scope Extension of the IO YFT UoA. Further information on the harmonisation process is presented in Table 33.

Table 30: Harmonisation – supporting information.

Supporting information	
<p>The AGAC IO YFT Scope Extension was announced in December 2024. In January 2025, Control Union confirmed that it was undertaking a Scope Extension Assessment of one of its fisheries in the IO to include YFT as a UoA. A harmonisation meeting was held subsequently on the 12th March 2025, which was also attended by a BV team member as BV was shortly to announce a new scope extension assessment for IO YFT for ANABAC Indian Ocean purse seine skipjack fishery. This scope extension has since been published, and scores from the ACDR for the scope extension are included in the tables below.</p> <p>The harmonisation meeting considered mainly LRQA scoring and CU comments. All PIs were considered, but the discussion was centred around the differences between teams on PI 1.2.1. SId and PI 1.2.2 SIb.</p>	
Has there been an Annual Harmonisation meeting of which the results will be adopted?	Yes
Date of annual harmonisation meeting	12 th March 2025 (IO YFT P1)
If applicable, describe the meeting outcome	
<p>For P1, it was agreed that IO YFT does meet the MSC requirements. It was concluded that PI 1.2.1 SId was met at SG100 (LRQA to score up to SG100 at the next opportunity after the ACDR) but the PI 1.2.2 SIb score of SG60 was maintained (CU to score down to SG60 at the next opportunity).</p>	

Table 31: Overlapping Units of Assessment for the IO YFT Scope Extension

Fishery name	UoA	Certification status	Certification date	Performance Indicators to harmonise
AGAC four oceans Integral Purse Seine Tropical Tuna Fishery	IO Yellowfin tuna	Certified	July 2022	N/A (this fishery)
Dongwon Indian Ocean purse seine fishery	IO Skipjack tuna and Yellowfin tuna	In assessment	N/A	P1 – All IO YFT Some P2 SIs (Table PB1) P3 PIs related to IOTC

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ANABAC Indian Ocean purse seine skipjack fishery	IO Yellowfin tuna	Certified (With YFT UoA In Assessment)	February 2024	P1 – All IO YFT Some P2 SIs (Table PB1) P3 PIs related to IOTC
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Table 32. Harmonisation – scoring for Principle 1 (IO YFT)

Performance Indicators (PIs)	1.1.1	1.1.2	1.2.1	1.2.2	1.2.3	1.2.4
AGAC four oceans Integral Purse Seine Tropical Tuna Fishery	90	N/A	95	60	80	90
Dongwon Indian Ocean purse seine fishery	90	N/A	95	60	80	90
ANABAC Indian Ocean purse seine skipjack fishery	≥80	N/A	≥80	60-79	≥80	≥80

Table 33: Harmonisation – rationale for scoring differences.

If exceptional circumstances apply, outline the situation and whether there is agreement between or among teams on this determination (FCP v2.3 PB1.3.2.1).
Exceptional circumstances were not identified and there were no differences in the P1 scoring of IO YFT.

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8.9. Assessment Team – biographies

Brief summaries of the assessment team are provided, below. Full CVs are available on request from LRQA.

Team Leader, Principle 2 and Principle 3 Specialist: Dr. Rob Blyth-Skyrme

Dr. Rob Blyth-Skyrme is a consultant with a strong interest and involvement in the development of all areas of fisheries management and policy. Rob completed a Masters in aquaculture in 1998, and a PhD that looked at the sociological and environmental performance of an inshore fishery in 2004. He now has more than 20 years post-graduate experience, having worked as a marine fish farmer, a scientist on a groundfish stock assessment project, a Deputy Chief Fishery Officer (inshore fisheries management and enforcement), a Government advisor on fisheries and nature conservation and, since 2009, as an independent fisheries consultant. He has now been involved in more than 150 MSC audits and assessments of fisheries for species including tuna, shellfish, groundfish, salmon and freshwater percids, employing gears including purse seines, demersal seines, trawls, dredges, gillnets, longlines, traps and pole and line. Rob is employed as a Third Party Expert for the MSC's Peer Review College, and is a trainer with the MSC's Capacity Building Programme.

Rob has passed all the MSC training requirements for Team Member and Lead Assessor, and has no Conflict of Interest in relation to this fishery.

Principle 1 Specialist: Dr. Carlos Alvarez

Carlos obtained his Bachelor of Science and Master of Science degrees (in Biology) at the National University of Mexico. He later moved to Seattle USA to obtain his PhD at the School of Fisheries at the University of Washington. His research interest is focused on the management and conservation of wildlife and fisheries. This includes abundance estimation; assessment of population status; estimation of population parameters; the effect of human intervention; direct harvest; bycatch and associated environmental effects; projections based on biological potential; population viability; risk assessment; design of alternative management strategies. His background comes from work dealing with large, pelagic, data rich fisheries, but his current assessments are related to small-scale, coastal, data poor fisheries. Therefore, his present ambition is to combine ideas, techniques, knowledge and experience to improve the performance of these problematic activities in developing countries. Most of his experience has been focused on practical investigations applied to populations and fishery assessments and management as a consultant for governments, NGO's and private sector of different countries. Carlos has 10 years' experience in MSC pre-assessments, full assessments, and surveillance audits of different types of fisheries in different countries.

Carlos has completed the MSC Team member training modules for FCP V2.1 and the Summary of changes for FCP V2.2. He meets the Principle 1 competency criteria of Table PC3 section 1 and 2 and is fluent in Spanish, thus meeting the requirement of Table PC3.5.

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8.10. Objections – delete if not applicable

To be added at Public Certification Report stage

The CAB shall include in the report all written decisions on objections arising from the MSC Disputes Process.

Reference(s): MSC Disputes Process v1.0.

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