



Joint NGO statement on a drifting FAD closure in the Indian Ocean

4th May 2026

On behalf of IPNLF, SFACT, and Blue Marine Foundation,

We call the attention of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) on the occasion of its 30th Session to the continued need for measures to regulate use of drifting fish aggregating devices (dFADs) and **express significant concern that no proposal for an annual dFAD closure has been tabled.**

Estimated deployment of dFADs in the Indian Ocean have increased substantially from 9,325 in 2009 to 22,869 in 2021.ⁱ There is clear evidence that use of dFADs to catch adult skipjack significantly increases catches juvenile yellowfin and bigeye, with evidence stemming from all tropical ocean regions.ⁱⁱ This situation is particularly acute in the Indian Ocean, where 97% of yellowfin and almost all bigeye tuna caught around dFADs are immature.ⁱⁱⁱ Studies suggest that this percentage could be six times higher than the rates of juvenile catch in sets on free-swimming schools.^{iv}

Heavy exploitation of juveniles can lead to declines through growth and recruitment overfishing.^v Specifically to counter the risk posed by high juvenile catches, the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) has implemented ocean-wide dFAD closures since 2009, while the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna (ICCAT) has had area-specific dFAD closures since 1998, and an ocean-wide closure since 2020.

Given the use of FAD closures to protect stocks in other oceans, the IOTC has discussed implementing equivalent measures. A study by Correa *et al.*^{vi} found that, of all gear-specific closures, a three-month FAD closure is the best way to achieve healthy stock conditions. The IOTC must follow a precautionary approach and a measure like this would increase spawning biomass of all three major tropical tuna species, to prevent future declines.

Use of dFADs is also resulting in an unacceptably high impact on non-tuna species and the marine environment at large. It has been estimated that 100,000 silky sharks a year are caught as a result of sets on dFADs.^{vii} Meanwhile, although observed mortality rates are already high, unobserved mortality has been suggested to be from five to ten times the observed rate of bycatch.^{viii}

While the Commission's adoption of Resolution 24/02 secured measures to mitigate some of the risks posed by such high use of dFADs, further management measures remain urgent. In particular, **the harms caused by extremely high catches of juveniles and of silky sharks must be mitigated through a precautionary adoption of an IOTC dFAD closure.**

- ⁱ Schiller, L. et al. (2025) 'The global footprint of drifting fish aggregating devices', *Science Advances*, 11(19), Supplementary materials Table S4. Available at: [10.1126/sciadv.ads2902](https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.ads2902).
- ⁱⁱ *ibid.*, Figure 2.
- ⁱⁱⁱ See Global Tuna Alliance (2021) 'Sustainability of yellowfin tuna (*Thunnus albacares*) fisheries in the Indian Ocean'. Available at: <https://www.globaltunaalliance.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Naunet-Fisheries.2021.V3-new.pdf>; and Schiller et al., Figure 2.
- ^{iv} Amandè, M.J., Bez, N., Konan, N., Murua, H., Delgado de Molina, A., Chavance, P., and Dagorn, L. (2011) 'Areas with high bycatch of silky sharks (*Carcharhinus falciformis*) in the Western Indian Ocean purse seine fishery', IOTC-2011-WPEB07-29, 7th IOTC Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch. Available at: <https://iotc.org/documents/areas-high-bycatch-silky-sharks-carcharhinus-falciformis-western-indian-ocean-purse-seine>.
- ^v Bailey, M., Sumaila, U.R. and Martell, S.J. (2013) 'Can cooperative management of tuna fisheries in the western pacific solve the growth overfishing problem', *Strategic Behavior and the Environment*, 3(1-2), pp.31-66. Available at: [10.1561/102.00000023](https://doi.org/10.1561/102.00000023); Juan-Jordá, M.J., Mosqueira, I., Freire, J. and Dulvy, N.K. (2015) 'Population declines of tuna and relatives depend on their speed of life', *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 108 (51), article number 20650-20655. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1107743108>; Leroy, B., Phillips, J.S., Nicol, S., Pilling, G.M., Harley, S., Bromhead, D., Hoyle, S., Caillot, S., Allain, V. and Hampton, J. (2013) 'A critique of the ecosystem impacts of drifting and anchored FADs use by purse-seine tuna fisheries in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean', *Aquatic Living Resources*, 26(1), pp.49-61. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1051/alr/2012033>; Sasikumar, G., Mohamed, K.S., Rohit, P., and Sampathkumar, G. (2015) 'Can an aggregation-fishery be responsible for recruitment overfishing? A case study on cuttlefish stock associated with moored fish aggregation devices (FADs)', *Fisheries Research*, 172, pp.148-156. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fishres.2015.06.027>; Gjertsen, H., Hall, M. and Squires, D. (2010) 'Incentives to Address Bycatch Issues', *Conservation and Management of Transnational Tuna Fisheries*, pp. 225–248. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780813820262.ch14>.
- ^{vi} Correa, G., Merino, G., Santiago, J. and Urtizberea, A. (2023) 'Responses of tuna stocks to temporal closures in the Indian Ocean', IOTC-2023-WGFAD05-13, IOTC 5th ad hoc Working Group on FADs, Online, 4-6th October 2023. Available at: <https://iotc.org/sites/default/files/documents/2023/09/IOTC-2023-WGFAD05-13.pdf>.
- ^{vii} Filmlalter, J.D., Capello, M., Deneubourg, J.L., Cowley, P.D. and Dagorn, L., 2013. Looking behind the curtain: quantifying massive shark mortality in fish aggregating devices. *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*, 11(6). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1890/130045>.
- ^{viii} Ziegler, I., (2022) 'Assessing the impact of drifting FADs on silky shark mortality in the Indian Ocean' IOTC-2022-WGFAD03-10-Rev1, p.1. Available at: https://iotc.org/sites/default/files/documents/2022/10/IOTC-2022-WGFAD03-10_Rev1.pdf.



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