



ASSOCIATION OF NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS  
OF FISHING ENTERPRISES IN THE EU

## **European Tuna Freezers' Fleet Hit Hard by IOTC's Double Standards**

*20<sup>th</sup> May 2024, Brussels*

The Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC)'s 28<sup>th</sup> session, held from May 13<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> in Bangkok, Thailand, ended on a bitter note for the European fleet. Focusing on FAD measures, IOTC has successfully created a smoke screen to mask its serious governance deficiencies and failure to adequately manage fish stocks, especially yellowfin and neritic tunas or enforce proper monitoring, control, and surveillance.

Anne-France Mattlet, Director of Europêche Tuna Group, deeply regrets that “all measures proposed that were meant to improve transparency and better data for scientific analysis were either rejected or deeply weakened: this includes the Seychellean proposals to improve data collection and reporting, catch and effort, tropical tuna discard ban, the European Union's High Sea Boarding and Inspection Scheme and observer coverage increase. We believe that monitoring, control and surveillance, as well as data transparency, are the key for good management and urge IOTC members and other stakeholders to work in that sense during the intersessional period until the next Commission meeting in April 2025.”

As discussions were focused as always on FAD measures, not much time was devoted to try to revert the overfishing and overexploitation of yellowfin tuna: the fisheries closure has been rejected and several states keep objecting to the recovery plan for yellowfin tuna, strictly observed by the European purse seine fleet, that also have 24/7 satellite monitoring (VMS), 100% observer coverage, and apply the whole EU control regulations.

On the contrary, IOTC was extremely diligent in multiplying FAD measures that will have absolutely no effect of the yellowfin tuna stock recovery, as the purse seine fishery represent barely more than 20% of the catches and while a quota, respected by the European fleet, is already in place. Cuts in FAD numbers per vessels were adopted, down to 225 by 2028, while the organisation was already the stricter one in the world with 300 FADs per vessel. Exemptions have been granted to Small Island Developing States and countries with a limited number of purse seiners, such as Korea, but not to other developing or less developed states. This creates a significant disparity, disadvantaging notably European fleets and disrupting the level playing field.

Additionally, IOTC continues to reduce the number of supply vessels allowed per flag state without any scientific justification. This policy discriminates against shipowners with only one or two purse seiners within the same flag state, as they may lose their supply vessels. Coupled with the prohibition on registering new supply vessels in the IOTC's authorized vessel register, this measure also hinders developing states from expanding their fleets. Supply vessels are crucial for the purse seine fishery, as

they help manage and recover deployed FADs and reduce fleet fuel consumption—a vital factor given the current surge in global fuel prices. Therefore, they play a key role in the fleet's decarbonization strategy. These measures are threatening the economic viability of the EU purse seine fleet in the Indian Ocean, with little to no effect on the recovery of yellowfin tuna.

Xavier Leduc, president of Européche Tuna Group, questions this approach: “Despite assurances from DG Mare’s Director General Vitcheva that the EU would commit to preserving a level playing field in the IOTC, the European delegation, under pressure from pole-and-line states<sup>1</sup>, continues to accept non-science-based exemptions and reductions in FADs and supply vessels, which only exacerbate the inequality.”

There is some hope for IOTC as a management measure for skipjack and a full FAD biodegradability calendar, both required by the Tuna Freezers for a long time, have been successfully adopted. Mattlet concludes: “It is excellent news, though not a surprise as they essentially affect countries having purse seiners, which are definitely in favour of better management and science. As long as the usual objectors and non-complying states are not affected, there is no problem for IOTC to adopt science-based innovative management measures”.

ENDS

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<sup>1</sup> See Orthongel press release on Bloom and IPNLF’s influence in IOTC:  
[https://www.linkedin.com/posts/orthongel\\_comment-bloom-association-manipule-l-activity-7193652974240378880-pyVa](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/orthongel_comment-bloom-association-manipule-l-activity-7193652974240378880-pyVa)