

Sustainability in fisheries

Will our children’s children ever see tuna in real life?

The Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) is meeting in a special session this week to decide on what measures to take to stop the decline of yellowfin tuna in the Indian Ocean.

Contributed by Nature Seychelles

Scientists have been warning about the declining fortunes of yellowfin since 2015 and the IOTC has established fishing quotas. But overfishing continued and yellowfin is in what Dr. Nirmal Shah of Nature Seychelles calls the “Deep Red,” which is a high threat level. The yellowfin stock is the most overfished tuna stock in the world. “If the IOTC does not come out with a strong recovery plan for yellowfin there is a high probability that the stock will collapse in a couple of years or so,” says Shah. There are four proposals by several countries to this special session of the IOTC, although Seychelles is not among them.

The EU proposal only wants a 6% reduction in the catch of yellowfin based on catch levels of the benchmark year of 2014. Experts, NGOs, and even the tuna trade are saying a 20% cut is what is needed. Nirmal Shah has said that, “The EU proposal is actually a subterfuge or a “bat latet” as we say in Kreol, because compared to 2019, it would allow it to fish more. The EU has a fleet that has been proven to have broken IOTC quotas and overfished by thousands of tonnes in the Western Indian Ocean and they have done nothing about it. So they have a poor record in keeping to quotas.”

The threat to yellowfin is overharvesting by nations including Iran and India, and the over-reliance of the EU fleet on Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs). FADs catch mostly juveniles, which have not reproduced yet. FADs as well as the supply vessels that manage them have to be phased out. “In our artisanal fisheries we



IOTC needs to come out with a strong recovery plan from the Special Session (Photo - International Pole and Line Foundation)



A FAD collected from Cousin Island Special Reserve

do not allow our own people to catch juveniles of any species be they kakatwa or lobster. The mesh sizes of traps and nets are regulated. So why is it that we are allowing foreigners to catch juvenile tuna in our waters?” asks Shah.

Nature Seychelles has now joined over 100 organisations including Birdlife International (Nature Seychelles is the Birdlife Partner in Seychelles) as well as large industry players, to call for the support of the Kenyan and Sri Lankan Proposal to the IOTC, which intends to limit the use of FADs. Nature Seychelles has made its position on FADs clear in previous years - it wants to see an end to FAD fishing.

The industry has reacted strongly to the plummeting yellowfin stocks and the inability or unwillingness of the IOTC to reverse the trend with the likes of Tesco, Coop, and Princes refusing to source yellowfin from the Indian Ocean. A general boycott looms. The Global Tuna Alliance, a grouping of retailers and seafood companies, have called for a 20% reduction in yellowfin catch.

Indeed, the fishing effort on the stock is 20% above the level at which the stock can be fished sustainably. “The quotas are obviously not working because the EU fleet and others are still overfishing. The solution is to push for management measures called harvest strategies, based on the Precautionary Principle and the best available science, to be put in place,” Shah insists.

“But with yellowfin on its way out, unless the IOTC gets its act together, future generations of Seychellois may see yellowfin tuna only in pictures and in movies.” Shah concludes pessimistically.

WE'RE TAKING A STAND

We are calling for better management of drifting-FADs to reduce overfishing & the destruction of our oceans

JOIN US AS WE CALL FOR CHANGE!

Nature Seychelles has now joined over 100 organizations calling on the IOTC to limit the use of FADs



Yellowfin tuna - The Indian Ocean yellowfin has been classified as overfished since 2015 (Photo - International Pole and Line Foundation) (Photo - NOAA)