

# Retailers Refuse Yellowfin Tuna, Sustainability Crucial

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One-by-one #EthicalTuna #fishing techniques require so many more fishers per tonne of catch, so the industry creates more jobs than other fishing methods. As a result, #CoastalCommunities depending on this livelihood can raise their standard of living.” Source: Twitter

Ahead of the virtual 24<sup>th</sup> session of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) annual meeting in early November, international supermarket chains have pulled the plug on yellowfin tuna products. Environmental groups support this because they say yellowfin tuna is fast depleting and

a massive reduction in effort is essential for its recovery. South African retailers, on the other hand, have been ahead of the game for years...

The issues at hand are that yellowfin tuna remains overfished and subject to overfishing in the Indian Ocean. Catches continue to increase despite the recovery plan and catch reductions agreed in Resolution 19/01.

The catches of skipjack tuna also continue to increase and are 30% higher than the agreed harvest control rule.

Bigeye and albacore stocks are also overfished and are depleted.

That there are no complete management procedures in place for any key IOTC species, is of huge concern to environmental groups and stockists of tuna products.

So much so that this month (October) UK retailers, Marks & Spencer, Co-op and Tesco, said they would not stock yellowfin tuna products of any kind. They say this will be the status quo until they are certain the fishery is being sustainably maintained.

While music to the ears of environmental groups, the downside is the impact this will have on the huge numbers of small-scale fishers and fish processors who rely on the tuna fishery for an income.

Which is why it is essential that a robust rebuilding plan for the recovery of the yellowfin tuna stock is put in place.

## Stats reports

According to pole & line fleet catch data, skipjack tuna accounted for about 84% of the catch in 2018, but yellowfin tuna is the only main primary species.

Catches represent 16% and 15% of the UoA total catch in 2017 and 2018, respectively.

The latest stock assessment report available is the 2018 update, considered by both the Maldives skipjack 1st surveillance and the Echebatar skipjack 1st surveillance report.

Catch data updated in April 2020 suggest that catches of yellowfin tuna across the IOTC Area of Competence were 424,984 t in 2016, 418,938 t in 2017 and 438,579 t in 2018.

Rebuilding the yellowfin tuna stock has been a concern of the IOTC for several years. Resolution 16/ requires the Maldives to reduce its yellowfin tuna catches by 5% from the 2014 catch level from vessels >24m LoA.

The Resolution itself has been amended twice. The first time to allow small island developing states (SIDS), least developed countries and vulnerable economies, to select the base year depending on yellowfin tuna catch levels in 2014 or 2015. The second time it was amended to include support vessel to also mean supply vessels.

Maldives has decided to stick to its commitment to reduced yellowfin tuna catches by 5% from the 2014 catch levels. The government has implemented management measures and warns that if the limits are breached, it may close the fishery.

However, there is currently no nationally-defined cut-off catch or cut-off % reduction from the 2014 baseline that will trigger this closure.

The 2019 catch data has not yet been published.

Meanwhile there is a temporary ban on direct and indirect subsidies that could increase pole and line and handline capacity. The number of anchored FADs in

the national network is also limited to 50. FAD Fishing contributes higher catch percentages of yellowfin tuna compared to fishing from free-swimming schools).

Pole and line fishers are being encouraged to fish from free swimming schools.

Yellowfin tuna catches are being monitored using the new Fisheries Information System (FIS-Keyolhu) to ensure catches remain within limits.

The 2014 catches for Maldives pole & line skipjack fishery were 18,480.76 t. Reducing this by 5% represents catches of no more than 17,556.72 t further reduced for the years 2017 and 2018 to arrive at a figure of 17,619.34 t.

### What the environmentalists say

For the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), a 5% reduction in effort across all gears is not enough. It wants to see a 30% reduction in effort which the organisation says is essential for the recovery of yellowfin tuna stocks.

WWF says this “would this be a point of no return if no action is taken at the IOTC annual meeting” in November.

The International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF) – a global coalition of scientists, the tuna industry and WWF – agrees. It says a rebuilding plan for yellowfin tuna sustainability is its highest priority for IOTC.

“If implemented effectively, this would see a 15%-20% reduction from the 2017 yellowfin catch levels,” the ISSF says.

“In addition, IOTC needs to address over-catches in contravention of Res. 19/01,” which is further eroding its effectiveness, says the ISSF.

It also wants to IOTC to ensure that contracting party and cooperating non-contracting party comply with the rebuilding plan.

Furthermore, that skipjack catches are monitored and managed to ensure 2020/2021 catches do not exceed the limit set by the adopted Harvest Control Rule in Resolution 16/02.

International Pole and Line Foundation helps develop sustainable and equitable pole-and-line fisheries and to increase the market share of sustainably and equitably caught pole and line tuna.

It says handline fishers typically target larger tuna for fresh or fresh-frozen markets, while more volumes of canned tuna are pole-and-line caught.

Martin Purves, CEO of the IPNLF, tweeted recently, “because one-by-one [#EthicalTuna](#) [#fishing](#) techniques require so many more fishers per tonne of catch, the industry creates more jobs than other fishing methods. As a result, [#CoastalCommunities](#) depending on this livelihood can raise their standard of living.”

*EVERY TIME WE CATCH ONE #TUNA USING A  
POLE WITH ONE LINE AND ONE HOOK.*

*#MALDIVES #POLEANDLINE #FISHING  
PIC.TWITTER.COM/VWYG0DFH0Z*

*— MALDIVES FISHERMEN (@DHIMASVERIN)  
OCTOBER 12, 2020*

Traceability

A non-legally binding declaration that grew out of a dialogue among governments, companies and civil society at the United Nations Ocean Conference in June 2017, is the Tuna 2020 Traceability Declaration.

The Declaration is endorsed by some of the world's biggest retailers, tuna processors, marketers, traders and/or harvesters.

It is also supported by influential civil society organisations, and governments.

The Global Tuna Alliance believes the tuna supply chain should be legal and transparent and that effective traceability (tracking tuna products from vessel to the final buyer) underpins sustainability efforts.

This includes effective RFMO and government regulation and monitoring of fishing efforts and catches. Government action must also ensure all aspects of tuna fishing and processing are safe and free from human rights abuses and/or modern slavery.

Creating transparency and accountability within the supply chain will enable markets to directly support improved fisheries performance, says the Global Tuna Alliance.

For more about this read this article:

## **Control the line or no market**

If COVID-19 has taught the global fishing industry anything it is that without a market, there is no fishery. Which puts retailers in a particularly powerful position to dictate the terms.

Marks & Spencer says in its position statement it has "directly appealed to the United Kingdom, Maldivian and Sri Lankan delegations" to put forward the following asks to IOTC:

- The adoption of an effective recovery plan for yellowfin tuna and implementation of a catch reduction of 25% relevant to the catch in the year 2017. Coupled with this is the implementation of FAD management measures to reduce significant juvenile yellowfin mortality.
- A skipjack harvest control rule to ensure catches do not exceed the limit set by Resolution 16/02. This includes mandatory precautionary measures to reduce ongoing population decline of skipjack tuna.
- The reinstatement of fishery observer coverage and the development of electronic monitoring standards
- A proper fishery observer safety Bill of Rights and the adoption of a WCPFC mandatory observer safety reforms.
- A reform of regulations of at-sea transshipment and 100% scientific observer coverage of all industrial tuna vessels by 2024.

In another Tweet, Martin Purves says “[#HarmfulFisheriesSubsidies](#) are causing damage to [#SmallScaleFisheries](#) in markets. It impacts on livelihoods & undermines ocean conservation. [#Retailers](#) are complicit if they source from fisheries that benefit from these subsidies. [#ethicaltuna](#) [#SDGs](#) [#ResponsibleBusiness](#) [@CSRWire](#)”

## South African retailers ahead of the game

South African retailers are a step ahead of their international counterparts in working towards a sustainable seafood supply chain.

Woolworths and Pick n Pay were the first South African retailers to sign the WWF-SA Sustainable Seafood Initiative (WWF-SASSI) Retail Charter in 2008. This was the impetus for several other retailers to follow suit.

The charter set out target dates for participants to work to, with 2025 being the final phase of a long-term strategy to ensure that all fish and fish products are sourced from responsible fishing operations.

Some of the milestones achieved have included Pick n Pay becoming the first retailer in Africa to announce it would only sell seafood that is sourced 100% from the SASSI green list, certified sources, or from fisheries where improvement projects have been implemented (2011). Woolworths also stopped procuring longline caught yellowfin tuna (2011) and launched the first MSC-certified sustainable canned tuna in SA (2017).

By the time the first annual retailer report was published in 2014, there were 10 participants actively committed to sustainable seafood. They included SPAR Group, Ocean Basket and Breco Seafoods.

The list of participants has since grown to include the Shoprite Group in 2018.

According to Woolworths Sustainability Report published in September 2020, the company has embarked on a comprehensive review of its Fishing for the Future programme. It now plans to develop a new and more wide-ranging sustainable seafood procurement policy with new targets set for 2025.

## The sustainable shopper

At the end of the day, it is the consumer that has the last word.

