



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels
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LDAC - EU LONG DISTANCE
ADVISORY COUNCIL
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Subject: LDAC - Advice in preparation of 29th Session of IOTC 2025 - La Réunion, 13-17 April

Dear Mr. Rodriguez,

I extend my sincere thanks for the valuable insights provided by the Long Distance Advisory Council in anticipation of the 29th Session of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC). We have carefully reviewed your recommendations and highly appreciate the substantial effort dedicated to them.

I concur on the necessity for holistic measures that encompass all fleets and Contracting Parties (CPCs). These measures should ensure sustainability, science-based decision-making, and a level playing field as the foundation for IOTC decisions, while recognising the specific rights of coastal states in line with UNCLOS. Your emphasis on socio-economic evaluations, as well as accurate reporting and decision-making processes aligned with these principles is well noted.

Given that the European Union is hosting the annual meeting of the organisation, our collective role will be crucial in securing a successful outcome of the 29th session of the IOTC, continuing and building on the improved cooperation trend and achievements from last year's annual session in Bangkok. In this context, the EU has put forward an ambitious array of proposals for adoption. Showing our interest in addressing the many issues pertaining to the IOTC, the EU has once again been taking a proactive stance.

This year's session will be marked by discussions on the three tropical tuna species and by a number of proposals on sharks. Regarding the former, our position is clear and articulated in our proposals:

- The recent increase in the catch limits for bigeye tuna, defined in line with the existing management procedure, should be mirrored by a proportional increase for those CPCs whose catch reductions are contributing to the stock's improved status.
- Concerning yellowfin tuna, the EU fully endorses the recommendation of the Scientific Committee and the conclusion of the stock assessment which estimates the stock being in the green quadrant of the Kobe plot. We also acknowledge the existing uncertainties. Therefore, we propose to formally recognise the new catch limits. After the review of this year's assessment, it might be possible to transition from a rebuilding plan to a management plan to be agreed potentially in 2026.
- Regarding skipjack tuna, defining catch limits based on an equitable and realistic distribution key is a priority for this meeting, to provide fleets with certainty on their future fishing opportunities and ensure that this key stock for the EU purse seine fleet is harvested at sustainable levels. Although we have not submitted a specific EU proposal on this issue, we are committed to working constructively with other parties to reach a possible resolution.

On the topic of sharks, we recognize its prominence in the meeting agenda. Our proposals are unequivocal: full enforcement of the fins-naturally-attached policy and a targeted measure to address the concerning state of the shortfin mako stock. Additionally, we remain open to discussing a comprehensive approach that would enhance the protection of vulnerable shark species and address data shortcomings hindering further scientific advice.

Furthermore, I draw your attention to our proposal for the strict enforcement and extension of the ban on the use of gillnets, a highly non-selective gear.

Regarding monitoring, control and surveillance, the EU will reintroduce, with the support of several CPCs, its longstanding proposal for a High Seas Boarding and Inspection scheme aimed at bolstering the IOTC's capacity to combat IUU fishing. Lastly, the EU will also propose to restrict transshipment at sea to only CPC and CNCP to bring the IOTC framework closer to the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Transshipment.

The potential for reaching an agreement on each of these proposals will, of course, depend on the readiness of other parties to engage in good-faith negotiations. Rest assured, the EU delegation will exert every possible effort to secure a positive outcome, with the overarching goal of promoting sustainable fisheries in the Indian Ocean. We will achieve this by reaching out—also through our external service network—to our partners in the region, particularly those CPCs, with which we have Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements (SFPAs). I use every opportunity during my various meetings and participations to build partnerships and alliances in support of our work in IOTC and the other RFMOs, to which the EU is a party.

Yours sincerely,

Charlina VITCHEVA

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