

## Comments on RFMO Performance Review for the UN Secretariat as required under General Assembly Resolution 73/125

Ministry of Fisheries, Marine Resource and Agriculture, Maldives  
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### Background

The Maldives have been cooperating with regional and sub-regional arrangements as early as 1980s in managing straddling and highly migratory stocks of the Indian Ocean.

Prior to establishing IOTC the Maldives was an active member of the Indo Pacific-Tuna Program ([IPTP](#)) which started initially to establish a Indian Ocean tuna database. Later the program facilitated exchange of scientific information among fishing parties and eventually facilitated establishing the IOTC. Maldives contributed heavily as evidenced by one of the most complete and comprehensive tuna catch and effort database holdings in IOTC (from 1970 onwards).

IOTC was established in 1996 and Maldives became cooperating contracting party on 11 July 2011. Prior to that Maldives was a cooperating non-contracting party, attending relevant subsidiary committee meetings, contributing science and providing data as required.

The Maldives have been quite an active member of the IOTC since then, engaging with the entire membership, but more specifically with the Coastal States. In response to allocation of future fishing opportunities work that is going on since 2011, the Maldives have formed an informal group of like-minded group of Coastal States ([the G16 Group](#)). Maldives have initiated and successfully adopted 6 proposals as binding resolutions on managing skipjack and yellowfin tuna stocks of the Indian Ocean.

### Scope of the Performance Review:

IOTC has undertaken performance reviews in 2008 and 2015/2016. The Maldives took part in the second performance review.

The scope and process of the performance reviews followed guidelines agreed at the joint RMO meeting held in Kobe, Japan, 2007. The Review was conducted by a Review Panel consisting of an independent legal expert, a scientific expert, six IOTC contracting parties (members) and a non-governmental organization acting as observers. The meeting was chaired by the legal expert (who also was involved in the first performance review).

The scope of the review included mainly on i) consistency between the scientific advice and the conservation and management measures been adopted, ii) effectiveness of control measures been adopted by the IOTC, iii) adequacy between the agreement for the establishment of the IOTC relative to current and modern principles and governance of straddling stocks and iv) efficiency and transparency of financial and administrative management.

The motivation for modernizing the IOTC agreement is also partly related to IOTC being institutionally linked to FAO<sup>1</sup> and of Taiwan (China Province) not been a contracting party of the IOTC despite their fleet catching substantial volumes of IOTC-species on high seas and the through access arrangements within the Coastal States.

### **Process and structure:**

Like the first performance review members voluntarily chose to be involved in the exercise and this was agreed in the plenary of the Commission (4 Coastal States contracting parties and 2 DWFNs contracting parties). Members also decided the NGOs who were regularly engaged with the IOTC process.

The structure and arrangements were satisfactory. As per the Rule of Procedures for attending IOTC meetings the Meeting Participation Fund provided support for the Maldives.

### **Implementation of the recommendation:**

The first Performance review resulted 81 recommendation which was followed through by the Commissions at every annual plenary updating progress and providing feedback to the Secretariat as required. The second Performance review resulted 24 recommendations and 63 actions.

A major recommendation of the second performance review was that IOTC would be more appropriate as an independent entity and as such as a matter of urgency the Commission should decide whether the IOTC should remain with the FAO framework or become a separate legal entity and as necessary, begin consultation with the FAO on this matter. A related aspect of this, also coming from the first performance review, was that of modernizing the IOTC Agreement

The Commission decided to establish a Technical Committee on Performance Review to facilitate implementation of recommendation, but more specifically to facilitate for drafting and/or reviewing the text of modernizing the IOTC

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<sup>1</sup> IOTC is established under Article XIV of the FAO and considered as an "FAO Project"

agreement. The TCMP also provides platform for member states to review progress and provide comments on the implementation of the recommendations prior to the annual plenary.

**Lesson Learned / Observation:**

The most important segment of the Maldives fishery continues to consist of skipjack and yellowfin tuna (both are highly migratory and managed by the IOTC) and so the Maldives accords high priority for capacity building for regional engagement. Engaging with IOTC process has been a learning experience for the Maldives and the Ministry's staff have enormously benefitted in the process. Maldives also holds a number of IOTC-subsidary committee positions including the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice Chair of the Commission.

The science of stock assessment and the process of developing conservation and management measures can be highly technical, and this has been the case in the IOTC for most stock assessment exercises. A hindrance for effective performance of the IOTC is the great disparity between understanding of the science and IOTC process, in general, between the developed economy members and that of the developing Coastal States'. Unfortunately, this is further compounded by limited science being done in the Coastal States. The results have been lack of collective ownership and understanding about stock status and conservation and management measures. Increased capacity building in the developing economies will be crucial for improving ITOC's performance.

IOTC has a Meeting Participation Fund which under certain guidelines, support participation of the national scientist. This should be strengthened to foster more inclusive engagement of Coastal States in the IOTC process.

Like other RFMOs, major stocks in the IOTC are also getting close to over-exploitation and one species have been in the over-exploited and subjected to over-fishing state since 2015. Normally a reactive conservation and management measures is a stock rebuilding plan, which requires fishing states to reduce the catch. To this end, and in general, inability to account for the disproportionate burden of the implementation of the conservation and management measures will have to be addressed urgently.

Data gaps and uncertainty in data is also a challenging issue in the IOTC. More than 30% of the tropical species (skipjack, yellowfin) are taken by gillnet fleets of the Coastal States which has very limited data even on nominal catches. Some of the data acquisition systems in the developing economies need modernizing and

does not meet the needs conservation and management measures. Without support from either developed economies or form other means, it will be difficult to overcome the burden for the Coastal States in meeting these challenges.

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