

ISLAND CONSERVATION SOCIETY

POSITION PAPER - TOWARDS A POSITION ON FISH AGGREGATION DEVICES (FADs):

Background

The use of Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) has expanded greatly since the turn of the millennium. Many thousands of FADs are dumped in the Indian Ocean each year and in most cases are not recovered. This has increased the productivity of the fishing fleet but has brought significant environmental costs. The average FAD-caught fish is smaller and the catch includes a substantial number of juveniles. There is a relatively large bycatch including several species of pelagic sharks. The Indian Ocean FAD-based purse seine fishery has the highest percentage of bycatch in the world, 25%, compared to a global average of 16% (Daghorn *et al* 2013). Turtles also become entangled by ropes and netting beneath FADs and drown. FADs inflict considerable damage when they wash ashore at coral reefs.

Many NGOs have taken a position regarding FADs. There have been calls for substantial reductions in their use, time/area closures and a ban on the use of supply vessels. Recently, a letter calling for urgent action bearing more than 100 signatories was sent to the IOTC Secretariat for consideration at a Special Session of the Commission held in March 2021. Signatories included SOSF, SIF, MCSS and Nature Seychelles as well big international names such as WWF and BirdLife International.

ICS is responsible for conservation at more Seychelles islands than any other NGO. However, unlike some other Seychelles conservation NGOs, ICS has not yet taken a position regarding the use of FADs.

PROPOSED POSITION OF ICS FOR DISCUSSION

The purse seine fishery generally uses both anchored FADs (aFADs) and drifting FADs (dFADs). In Seychelles licensed purse seiners use exclusively dFADs. From the mountains of physical evidence collected over several years, ICS can establish that dFADs are the cause of the most severe ecological damage including beaching on most, if not all, of the outer islands causing severe damage to healthy coral reefs and inshore habitats, entanglement and killing of turtles, marine mammals, sharks and other non-target species, (including damage to juvenile tuna stocks (classified as bycatch) and an unacceptable contribution to non-degradable marine debris. ICS recognises the urgent need to improve dFADs management in the Indian Ocean and reduce the environmental impact of dFADs through the use of electronic tracking, non-entangling and biodegradable FADs, to reduce ecological impacts on marine and coastal habitats. ICS supports conservation measures submitted by Kenya and Sri Lanka as Proposal IOTC-2021-SS4-PropD, "On management of fish aggregating devices (FADs) in the IOTC Area of Competence". ICS supports strong measures to clean-up the damages already inflicted upon the environment and the on-going search for measures to prevent future damage.

RECOMMENDATIONS

ICS had had meetings with the Sustainable Indian Ocean Tuna Initiative (SIOTI) (an association of key governments in the region, major tuna processors, producer organisations & fishing vessels), OPAGAC, (a Spanish organisation of frozen tuna producers), IDC, and the Minister of Fisheries.

The conclusion from these meetings is that the use of FADs in the Seychelles tuna fishery will remain for the foreseeable future. In view of this, it is recommended that ICS actively engage with the relevant parties to carry out a review and revision of (i) the existing FAD MANAGEMENT PLAN and (ii) the new FAD WATCH Agreement during this calendar year. Discussions should focus around:

- the acknowledgment and enforcement of the principle that that the polluter must pay for the environment damage and the subsequent clean-up at all islands, not only the 5 ICS islands;
- the funding of serious and ongoing research into minimizing the environmental impact of FADs through electronic tracking and more environmental-friendly FAD design and construction; and
- The role of ICS and/or IDC in the mitigation of environment damage to marine flora and fauna and subsequent clean-up operations at all islands where they operate.

It is proposed that ICS should commence and lead discussions with the relevant parties with a view to achieving a comprehensive revision of the two agreements mentioned. It is intended that these discussions should start in July this year with a view to finalisation and execution in 2022.

SUBMITTED FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Reference

Dagorn, L. Holland, K. N., Restrepo, V. and Moreno G. (2013). Is it good or bad to fish with FADs? What are the real impacts of the use of drifting FADs on pelagic marine ecosystems? *Fish and Fisheries* 14: 391-415.