



WWF

HIGHLIGHT

2014



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TUNA

MSC certification in the Maldives has made waves across the Indian Ocean

The poles today are made of fibreglass instead of bamboo, but pole-and-line fishing practices in the Maldives have changed little over the centuries. Tuna are caught one by one, lured with live bait onto barbless hooks, then flicked at the end of long poles from the water to the boat's deck. Highly selective, and avoiding bycatch of other species like turtles and sharks, pole-and-line's impact on tuna populations and the marine environment is low.

But when the Maldives pole-and-line skipjack tuna fishery first applied for Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification, WWF saw problems. While local boats in the Maldives might have been fishing at sustainable levels, the same could not necessarily be said of other, larger fleets operating on the high seas. Skipjack tuna are highly mobile and spread across the Indian Ocean, requiring management as a single stock. Credible certification would have been impossible without appropriate measures at the stock-wide level to manage and safeguard Indian Ocean skipjack tuna stocks.

"We had to clear a lot of hurdles," says Dr Shiham Adam, Director General of the Maldives' Marine Research Centre, part of the Ministry of Fisheries and Agriculture. "And in the process of doing so, we had to

raise standards within the whole Indian Ocean region."

CONDITIONS

The first step was Maldives becoming a full member of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC). The IOTC is responsible for managing tuna fisheries in the region, but had previously been unable to take effective action to ensure they operated sustainably, often due to differences between member states.

"After we joined the IOTC in 2010, we had to almost single-handedly encourage the first model-based skipjack stock assessment for the region" says Shiham. This showed that, for now, skipjack stocks remain healthy – and in 2012 the Maldives pole-and-line skipjack fishery achieved MSC certification, making it the first fishery in the Indian Ocean to do so. On WWF's insistence, however, the certification came with a set of conditions to be fulfilled within five years in order for the Maldives to retain their certification.

Chief among these was defining science-based benchmarks and controls to maintain healthy skipjack stock levels for the entire Indian Ocean. The Maldives, with support

"Not all tuna fisheries are able to supply sustainably sourced pole-and-line tuna, that's why it's vital for us to support those that do. We're keen to help them maintain MSC certification."

Terry O'Brien
Managing Director
Simplot Australia
(owner of the John West brand)

TARGET

By 2017

Key tuna Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (IOTC, WCPFC and IATTC):

- follow scientific advice on fishing quota that are equitably allocated
- apply conservation measures for bycatch/non-target species
- adopt the precautionary approach to maintain/rebuild stocks at ecologically sustainable levels
- apply control measures to reduce overfishing

Tuna supply chain

- at least 70% of Indian Ocean (IO) tuna harvests (by species and volume) are MSC certified or are undergoing full MSC assessment, and are fully traceable to legal, transparent fisheries

PROGRESS TO DATE

- 12.9% of global tuna is MSC certified (January 2014)



CONTEXT

Threats

- Tuna lack adequate management that can act effectively to prevent or address overfishing
- Unsustainable bycatch of non-target species including sea turtles, sharks and small cetaceans, many of which have high conservation and biodiversity value
- Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported (IUU) fishing

Opportunities

- Improved regional fisheries management is critical to strengthening the governance of marine ecosystems
- Poverty alleviation by transforming the economies of tuna fishing in the Indian and Pacific Oceans
- Rights-based management and designing, financing and implementing international traceability systems can enhance the value of sustainable fishing practices and create incentives for fishers
- Engaging in Fishery Improvements Projects (FIPs) helps fisheries increase their sustainability so they can meet MSC standards

TRENDS

- High consumer demand
- Increased skipjack catches in Pacific and Indian Ocean

from WWF, John West and others, is developing a new scientific modelling system for assessing tuna stocks. Thanks to a strong push from the Maldives, in May 2013, the IOTC agreed on limits determined by scientists relating to skipjack stocks and catches. If adhered to, these limits are likely to keep stocks within safe levels, helping to secure a sustainable future for skipjack tuna in the Indian Ocean.

sustainably manage other tuna species have risen significantly.

“We’re proud of what the Maldives has achieved through MSC certification,” says Shiham. “For a small nation it’s quite incredible.”



The Marine Stewardship Council contributes to the health of the world’s oceans by recognizing and rewarding sustainable fishing practices.

[msc.org](http://www.msc.org)

TURNING THE TIDE

At the same meeting, the IOTC adopted resolutions to protect sharks and cetaceans. These included a ban on landing white-tip sharks, whose numbers have fallen sharply due to overfishing, and on setting purse seine nets around whale sharks and cetaceans. The Maldives itself is a shark sanctuary, having imposed a complete shark-fishing ban in 2010.

By retaining MSC certification, the Maldives will be able to continue selling its tuna to discerning, high-value markets, particularly in Europe. And in fighting tenaciously to do so, the country has managed to turn the tide toward sustainability in the Indian Ocean. Now that a precedent has been set, the chances of the IOTC adopting measures to

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