

ISSF RESPONSIBLE FISHING GUIDELINES FOR TUNA LONGLINE FISHERIES



Juan Pedro Monteagudo, Hilario Murua, Víctor Restrepo & Holly Koehler /
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Abstract

Many tuna fisheries have begun to enter Fishery Improvement Projects (FIPs) to address the problems that would prevent them from achieving or maintaining Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification. This includes longline fisheries that target tunas such as albacore, bigeye and yellowfin. ISSF and other NGOs have put together lists of the elements that they consider to be most important for effective management of longline tuna fisheries. This paper emphasizes the most important and common weaknesses identified in longline tuna FIP action plans against ISSF's technical report on Recommended Best Practices for Longline Fisheries in Transition to MSC Certification (ISSF, 2020).

Author Information

J.P. Monteagudo, H. Murua, V. Restrepo and H. Koehler
International Seafood Sustainability Foundation
655 15th Street NW, Suite 800
Washington, DC 20005

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The International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF) — a global coalition of seafood companies, fisheries experts, scientific and environmental organizations, and the vessel community — promotes science-based initiatives for long-term tuna conservation, FAD management, bycatch mitigation, marine ecosystem health, capacity management, and illegal fishing prevention. Helping global tuna fisheries meet sustainability criteria to achieve the Marine Stewardship Council certification standard — without conditions — is ISSF's ultimate objective. To learn more, visit issf-foundation.org, and follow ISSF on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and LinkedIn.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This Responsible Fishing Guidelines document is intended to help tuna longline FIPs and MSC-certified fisheries (referred to here as “Longline Tuna Fisheries”) by describing a series of key recommendations and best practices for conducting more responsible fishing operations. These recommendations could also be useful for improving scores against the MSC standard, and they intend to address the most important and common weaknesses identified in longline tuna FIP action plans against [ISSF’s technical report on Recommended Best Practices for Longline Fisheries in Transition to MSC Certification \(ISSF, 2020\)](#). They include the high-level best practices recommended for longline tuna fisheries across all RFMOS, particularly for MSC Principles 1, 2 and 3.

Longline Tuna Fisheries adopting these responsible fishing guidelines should biannually review and update their commitments to incorporate not only the latest scientific recommendations and RFMO requirements but also inputs from FIP stakeholders.

The document is organized into three sections following MSC Principles 1, 2 and 3. Each section lists key elements that longline tuna fisheries should commit to in order to consistently support their FIP and/or achieve certification to unconditionally meet the three MSC Principles:

Principle 1: Sustainable target fish stocks. A fishery must be conducted in a manner that does not lead to overfishing or depletion of the exploited populations and, for those populations that are depleted, the fishery must be conducted in a manner that demonstrably leads to their recovery.

Principle 2: Environmental impact of fishing. Fishing operations must allow for the maintenance of the structure, productivity, function and diversity of the ecosystem (including habitat and associated dependent and ecologically related species) on which the fishery depends.

Principle 3: Effective management. The fishery is subject to an effective management system that respects local, national and international laws and standards and incorporates institutional and operational frameworks that require the use of the resource to be responsible and sustainable.

2. Principle 1. Sustainable target fish stocks. Harvest strategy and fleet data requirements

Comprehensive, robust and precautionary harvest strategies are the foundation of modern sustainable fisheries management, which will allow fishery management objectives to be achieved. As such, longline tuna fisheries must be fully committed to comply with current harvest strategies for their fleets and target species or, if necessary, to support harvest strategy development and adoption whenever they are unavailable, incomplete, or inadequate. Particularly, fishery-dependent data are an integral part of the harvest strategy, key for tuna stock assessments, and needed for monitoring and evaluation of the harvest strategy, ultimately ensuring proper management and the long-term sustainability of target stocks.

Harvest strategies include the following elements:

- RFMO stock-specific, time-bound, management objectives: Longline tuna fisheries should support the review, discussion, and adoption of management objectives at the RFMO level.
- RFMO stock-specific target and limit reference points, including associated uncertainty: Longline tuna fisheries should support initiatives to investigate and develop biological reference points.
- Adequate monitoring strategy of fishing activities, which will provide evidence of implementation and effectiveness of the current harvest strategy and management system: Longline tuna fisheries must ensure that RFMO requirements for data collection, quality and reporting are met by them. In addition, they should provide voluntary fishery data to support RFMO scientific bodies' work where data gaps exist.
- Harvest Control Rules (HCR) for all target stocks: Longline tuna fisheries should support the Management Strategy Evaluation process and the development of HCRs, and should advocate for harvest control rules adoption by the RFMO, in collaboration with other longline tuna fisheries and any other concerned stakeholders (these might include other MSC-aspiring tuna fisheries, flag states and coastal licensing states).
- Support an adequate review and evaluation of current harvest strategy and management system: Longline tuna fisheries must report data to RFMOs, relevant research bodies, or specific research projects to allow for an evaluation of the harvest strategies' effectiveness.

To adequately support those elements, the longline tuna fisheries should engage in the following actions identified under each of the high-level best practices, which are identified in [ISSF's Recommended Best Practices for Longline Fisheries in Transition to MSC Certification \(ISSF, 2020\)](#):

2.1. Longline tuna fisheries must commit to comply with flag state and RFMO reporting requirements for fisheries statistics on target and non-target species.

- Fill out completely and accurately the logsheets required by the flag state, licensing authority, and/or RFMO for each set during a trip
- Collect and report nominal catch as well as catch, effort and size information by species to flag state/RFMO as per RFMO requirements to feed the information into stock assessments
- Ensure that the data are adequately compiled and reported to the RFMO

2.2. Longline tuna fisheries should commit to voluntarily provide historical and current operational data and information beyond minimum requirements for improved stock assessment and characterization of ecosystem impacts.

- Provide set-by-set operational catch, catch/effort, species composition, size composition and discards (including fate) data to inform stock assessments
- Release historical raw datasets and make information available to RFMO Scientific Committees or national research institutions, for improvement of Catch Per Unit Effort (CPUE) indices and, ultimately, to reduce uncertainties in stock assessments
- Respond to specific data requests by tuna RFMOs that can be met by the longline tuna fisheries
- Collaborate in RFMO fish sampling programs to contribute to biological studies to improve the stock assessments

2.3. Longline tuna fisheries should commit to support science-based fishing effort and/or catch limitation measures for longline and other fleets to ensure stocks are maintained around Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) levels.

- Support the adoption of management measures that clearly identify the shares of the catch and/or effort that should go to different gear types
- Support the setting of catch or effort limits for the longline fishery and other gear types that will allow the stock to fluctuate around a level consistent with MSY (or the target reference point, if one has been adopted)
- Other analyses that support RFMO management objectives (e.g., reduce effort, time/area management)
- Support research studies to investigate Biological Reference Points for target species
- Participate in and support scientific studies that identify catch and/or effort limits and measures to ensure stock is maintained at MSY
- Engage with other FIPs and MSC-certified fisheries with similar UoA, and coordinate efforts to promote adoption of management measures to ensure stock health

3. Principle 2. Minimize environmental impacts of fishing

The impacts on non-target species (including Endangered, Threatened, and Protected species — ETPs), habitats and the broader ecosystem by longline tuna fisheries must be appropriately characterized, quantified and managed to ensure that ecosystem structure, productivity, function and diversity are maintained. Thus, the fishery must establish proper monitoring and reporting so that management strategies can be appropriately evaluated and updated when necessary, while also being verified for compliance.

To address the environmental impacts of fishing, longline tuna fisheries **should implement the following actions identified under each of these high-level best practices** listed in ISSF's Recommended Best Practices for Longline Fisheries in Transition to MSC Certification (ISSF, 2020):

3.1. Longline tuna fisheries must commit to address ecosystem impact and bycatch issues, particularly interactions with ETP species.

Manage impacts on non-target species

- Monitor the bycatch and discard rates of non-target species, and investigate means to reduce the catch of these species, if needed
- Provide bycatch and discard rates to flag states/RFMOs to be included in the stock assessment of those species
- Support the assessment and adoption of management measures for non-target species
- Conduct ecological risk assessments for the fishery under the FIPs to identify species of high risk or concern
- Ensure bait is sourced responsibly, by documenting the species, amounts and origin, and periodically review the current status of and trend in bait stocks

Support and implement adequate observer coverage and monitoring

- Ensure RFMO observer coverage requirements are met at the start of the longline tuna fishery action plan implementation (at least 5% of fishing effort, in line with most RFMOs' management regulations)
- Supplement existing RFMO observer requirements with a voluntary observer program by human observers or Electronic Monitoring (EM) system following minimum standards and recommendations¹ and covering 100% of fishing operations. For EM systems, a minimum 20% of recorded effort in hauled hooks should be reviewed for analysis.
- Support RFMO measures to require 100% observer coverage (human and/or electronic) in industrial tuna longline fisheries, including all those engaged in at sea transshipment, by 2024.
- Collect information through observers and monitoring programs to demonstrate compliance with:
 - RFMO management measures

¹ Application of Electronic Monitoring Systems in Tuna Longline Fisheries. International Workshop. 2015 Kaohsiung, Taiwan. ISSF 2016-07. SPC Oceanic Fisheries Programme Observer Certification and Training Standards.

- FIP action plan strategies and commitments
- RFMO and national at-sea and in-port transshipment requirements
- Ensure data collected on fleet activities and strategies are processed adequately. The longline tuna fisheries should submit fishery statistics and observer data to an RFMO or scientific institution capable of processing and analyzing the data to evaluate the implementation and performance of strategies aimed at managing impacts on non-target species.

Apply and research best practices for handling and safe release of bycatch species

- Implement RFMO and flag state requirements and recommendations for bycatch and ETP species for safe release
- Advocate for the RFMO and flag states to adopt mandatory best handling and release practices for ETP species
- Implement best practices to release unwanted catch and ETP species groups alive (see ISSF's Longline Skippers' Guidebook and ISSF Conservation Measure 3.6)
- Promote research to further develop best practices for handling and safe release and equipment that allow for quick, safe and effective live release that can lead to more selective fishing

Implement proven mitigation measures and/or gear modifications

- Implement mitigation and gear modification measures as indicated in ISSF's Longline Skippers' Guidebook and in compliance with ISSF Conservation Measure 3.6 on Transactions with Vessels Implementing Best Practices
- Conduct regular training for fleet managers, skippers and crew in bycatch handling, gear modification and bycatch mitigation measures as required by ISSF Conservation Measure 3.4 on Skipper Best Practices
- Conduct and support research and training to further develop and improve gear modification and bycatch mitigation techniques and strategies

3.2. Longline tuna fisheries must ensure shark finning is not taking place.

- Adopt a binding, public shark-finning prohibition policy and demonstrate it is being enforced
- Require FIP/MSC participant fleets to land sharks with their fins naturally attached as required by ISSF Conservation Measure 3.1(c) on Sharks.

4. Principle 3. Effective management

A responsible and sustainable use of the resources requires a robust and effective management system to be in place. This management system for longline tuna fisheries needs to be implemented at three levels: the flag state(s), the RFMO where it operates, and the countries in whose EEZs it is licensed to fish. There are a number of actions that the fishery/fleets of the FIP should support that would ensure an effective management of the resources/fisheries.

In order to implement an effective management system, the longline tuna fishery **should support the following actions under each of the high-level best practices** identified in ISSF's [Recommended Best Practices for Longline Fisheries in Transition to MSC Certification](#) (ISSF, 2020):

4.1. General – Longline tuna fisheries must commit to comply with as well as support the RFMO management measures.²

- Support the development and maintenance of an accurate active list of vessels authorized by the RFMO (Van der Geest, 2021)
- Comply thoroughly with existing RFMO management measures and recommendations
- Support the adoption of, or strengthening of, mechanisms to evaluate compliance with the management measures adopted (Koehler, 2021)
- Support the implementation of RFMO management measures and promote mechanisms and responses to incentivize compliance and sanction non-compliance
- Support the adoption of a strong Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS) framework (vessel licensing and registration, Vessel Monitoring System – VMS, electronic logbooks and reporting, observer coverage and the monitoring of landings or in-port transshipments), including Port State measures that fully implement the [FAO Port State Measures Agreement](#)³

4.2. Fleet specific – Longline tuna fisheries must commit to comply with and support management at the national and flag state level.

- Support efforts for periodic review of the performance of flag state and RFMO management systems
- Support strong RFMO and flag state MCS systems
- Advocate for the laws of the countries where the fishery is licensed to operate to be in line with RFMO and international requirements
- Some longline fisheries transship much of their catch at sea, and, in those cases, all transshipments must comply with RFMO management measures for at-sea transshipment and must occur under the monitoring of an RFMO observer program, to collect and report all required data. Moreover, the fleets involved in transshipments should ensure transshipment best practices⁴ are followed. To the extent possible, carrier vessels conducting

² As most of these actions are dependent on successful adoption by the RFMO through participatory processes, many of these can only be implemented at an advocacy level to the flag state/RFMO and through collaboration with and support from other interested stakeholders.

³ [Port State Measures in Tuna RFMOs: Benchmarking RFMO Port State Measures Against the 2009 FAO PSMA and Identifying Gaps](#)

⁴ [Collective Best Practices for Well-Managed At-Sea Transshipment](#).

transshipments for the longline tuna fishery participant fleet or involved in the FIP's supply chain should also incorporate transshipment best practices and recommendations.

- The fishery should also support continued improvement and transparency of at-sea transshipment regulations by RFMOs to ensure the practice is well managed.
- Maintain a training program for fleet managers, skippers and crew on IUU fishing, RFMO and licensing states management measures

Due to the specificity and changing nature of RFMO and flag state regulations, this document does not include precise recommendations for P3 in relation to them, other than to request that RFMO/flag state regulations are completely and adequately complied with to ensure MSC requirements are met.

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iss-foundation.org

655 15th Street NW, Suite 800
Washington D.C. 20005
United States

Phone: + 1 703 226 8101
E-mail: info@iss-foundation.org

