



# International Game Fish Association

## Fishing Hall of Fame & Museum

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The International Game Fish Association (IGFA) is a non-profit organization that represents recreational anglers throughout the world. IGFA was established in 1939, has active members in 162 countries, is the governing body for international recreational fishing, and provides rules for ethical angling practices. Many of IGFA's members target the highly migratory species managed by IOTC, especially marlin, sailfish and spearfish (i.e. billfish) which are primarily caught and released.

IGFA has great concern about how highly migratory species are being managed on a global level for recreational anglers. The lack of data and accurate reporting on billfish catch is of particular concern. As an organization that is committed to the conservation of game fishes, IGFA has deployed 241 pop-up satellite archival tags in marlin around the world in the last five years, many of which have been in waters under this organization's purview. The information gained from this exercise is available to your scientific committee.

The following are IGFA's recommendations for the 20<sup>th</sup> Session of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission:

### **Billfish**

- Although primarily a commercial bycatch species, billfish are highly sought after recreational species that are primarily caught and released. IGFA urges the IOTC to manage all billfish at higher abundance levels than  $B_{MSY}$  for recreational anglers. We also urge the IOTC to adopt mandatory release of any billfish that is landed alive.
- The 2015 stock assessment concluded striped marlin to be overfished and subject to overfishing with little sign of rebuilding despite declining trends in effort. IGFA recommends reducing catch to no more than 3,000 t, which would give the stock a greater than 60% chance of achieving  $B > B_{MSY}$ .
- Data for black marlin continue to remain poor. As such, there is a great amount of uncertainty regarding the status of this stock, but the latest information suggests that the stock is subject to overfishing. Total catch increased to a total of 17,996 t in 2014, which is a 22% increase from 2013 levels. There is also a high risk of exceeding MSY range of 7,600 – 13,800 t by 2016 if catches increase further. Because of the data poor nature and high degree of uncertainty of the black marlin stock, a conservative management approach is warranted and catch should be capped at no more than 7,000 t. IGFA also recommends a decrease in gillnet catch and improvement in data collection and reporting to further assess the stock.
- The most recent stock assessments undertaken in 2013 indicate that blue marlin are currently overfished but not subject to overfishing. However, given the sharp increase in reported catches over the last three years, that are well above MSY, the stock is likely subject to overfishing. IGFA recommends that fishing mortality not be increased so that the stock can rebound to levels in excess of  $B_{msy}$ . Total catch should be capped at no more than 8,000 t.
- No formal stock assessments exist for Indo-Pacific sailfish and stock status remains uncertain. Better data collection is necessary for these species so that their true abundance can be accurately estimated. Because there is no MSY target for the Indian Ocean, IGFA recommends taking a precautionary approach where catches are limited to no more than 20,000 t.
- IGFA further recommends implementing a prohibition on billfish entering into international trade. Similar legislation has recently been passed, at the request of IGFA, in the United States that now bans importation of marlin, sailfish and spearfish into the continental United States.
- IGFA recommends all countries be required to report dead discards and use circle hooks in their

longline fisheries.

### **Tuna**

- According to the 2015 assessment, yellowfin tuna is experiencing overfishing, in an overfished condition and subject to collapse within five years under current conditions. The Commission should take immediate action to end overfishing and develop a rebuilding plan to ensure longterm sustainability of this important fishery
- Longtail tuna are most likely overfished and subject to overfishing. There is also concern that site fidelity can lead to localized depletion. IGFA recommends catches reduced in Indian Ocean to at or below 111,000 t and improvement in data collection and reporting.

### **Sharks**

- IGFA recommends that IOTC prohibit the removal of shark fins at sea to improve the enforcement of the shark finning ban.
- IGFA recommends banning wire traces on all longlines.

### **FADs**

- IGFA support the development of an IOTC working group for FADs. We have great concern about the growing use of FADs and how it can lead to high levels of bycatch of unintended and/or undersized species. We urge the working group to better evaluate the impact of FADs and to also better quantify the number of FADs that can be sustainably deployed. IGFA supports specific measures to:
  - Reduce the overall number of FADs deployed
  - Prohibit the use of lights on drifting FADs
  - Employ individual reference numbers and GPS communication for each individual FAD
  - Have vessels report to their flag nation the number of FADs they are fishing
  - Have annual reporting and electronic monitoring of deployed FADs
  - Have management plans that specifically address how to reduce the unintended and/or undersized species bycatch associated with FADs

### **IUU**

- IGFA recommends that IOTC strengthen the controls against illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

### **General**

- Recreational angling is an established and important economic entity in developed countries and a growing one in many developing nations. As such, IGFA wishes that IOTC recognize both its relevance and that it may necessitate alternate management objectives than those used in commercial fisheries. As it is the world's peak body regarding recreational fisheries, IGFA kindly offers its consultation to IOTC on recreational fisheries issues.
- Managing fisheries on the basis of MSY is an excessively risk-prone approach. As such, IGFA suggests that IOTC adopt a target biomass above  $B_{MSY}$  to compensate for biological, environmental and data uncertainties. Many recreational fisheries are catch and release in nature, where anglers prefer to catch more and bigger fish than to necessarily harvest fish. Managing stocks on the level of MSY not only reduces the abundance of fish but also their average size. Maintaining stocks at higher abundances (i.e., optimum yield) also benefits recreational anglers that release their fish and also contributes to the substantial economic value of these fisheries. IGFA feels this is especially true with bycatch species such as marlin and sailfish that have little commercial value but great economic value to recreational anglers.
- IGFA supports measures to stabilize the level of fishing capacity active on the stocks of high commercial value under the IOTC responsibility.