



Ministry of Fisheries and Ocean Resources

Male', Maldives.

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Press Release

Maldives to Reopen Longline Tuna Fishery with Sustainable Management Measures in Place

Tuna species are known for their extensive migration across thousands of kilometers in the Indian Ocean. They are a primary target for fishing by various countries, including both artisanal and industrial fishing fleets. As these species transverse international waters and exclusive economic zones (EEZ)s of various nations and are fished by multiple countries, the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement (UNFSA), under the United Law of the Convention on the Law of the Sea, mandates cooperation between countries for the sustainable use and management of these species. In this regard, the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) is the regional fisheries management organization responsible for managing tuna fisheries in the Indian Ocean. The decisions made by this commission are binding and must be implemented at the national level by all member countries, including the Republic of Maldives.

In its commitment to sustainably manage bigeye and yellowfin tuna stocks in the Indian Ocean, the IOTC had passed a resolution setting a maximum catch limit for each member country. Although the Maldives has been allocated quotas for these tuna species, its fishing vessels have consistently remained well below the prescribed limits. As part of President Dr. Mohamed Muizzu's pledge to diversify the economy and maximize the benefits derived from ocean resources, the Government of Maldives has announced its intention to reopen the longline fishery in the Maldives, and a draft of the associated regulation has been published on the Ministry's website for public comments. The draft regulation has also been shared with primary stakeholders, handline fishers, yellowfin tuna processors as well as various other government and enforcement agencies for their feedback.

Considering the past experience and the advice of other longlining fishing States, provisions have been included in the draft regulation to ensure that the fishery is beneficial to Maldivians and

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Velaanage, 7th Floor

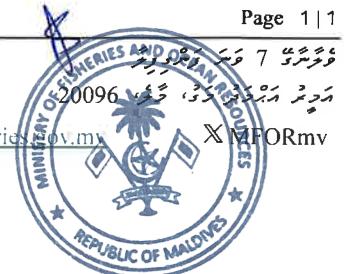
Ameer Ahmed Magu, Male', 20096 Republic of Maldives

☎ (+960) 33322625

🌐 www.fisheries.gov.mv

✉ admin@fisheries.gov.mv

✉ AFORmv



adheres to globally recognized sustainability standards and international best practices. The draft regulation includes provisions to ensure the safety, security, and welfare of the vessels' crew members, require vessels to install Vessel Locating Devices and Electronic Monitoring Systems, as well as obtaining a Departure Clearance permit before setting out to the sea for each fishing trip. Additionally, certain areas have been designated as off-limits for longline fishing, particularly to protect handline tuna fishing areas and to minimize potential conflicts with other fishing activities. Areas within 100 miles of the Maldives' archipelagic baseline and the area south of the 6 degrees North latitude in the entire EEZ of Maldives will be also prohibited for longline fishing in the Maldives.

The regulation also includes provisions for the management of bycatch species such as sharks. While targeted shark fishing remains prohibited, the regulation allows for non-targeted bycatch species, including sharks, caught in longline fishing to be landed and processed in specially licensed facilities, in accordance with globally accepted best practices and principles. The regulation also enforces strict measures to minimize shark bycatch. These include banning wire traces and shark lines, regulating line depths, and mandating the release of live sharks brought on board with minimal harm. Dead sharks must be brought ashore with their fins naturally attached, in line with globally accepted best practices.

Further measures aimed to reduce bycatch discards, following the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations and other guidelines from relevant international organizations requires sharks caught incidentally as bycatch to be processed in specially licensed facilities that comply with stringent licensing conditions, similar to other authorized fish processing plants.

Public consultation on the proposed longline fishing regulation opened on August 5, 2024. The Government welcomes all suggestions and feedback on the draft regulation, with submissions due by Sunday, August 18, 2024, at 12:00 noon. Comments can be sent via email to fisheriesmanagement@fisheries.gov.mv.

15 August 2024

