ON THE CONSERVATION OF MOBULID RAYS CAUGHT IN ASSOCIATION WITH FISHERIES MANAGED BY IOTC

SUBMITTED BY: MALDIVES

Explanatory Memorandum

This proposal pursues the following aims:

- It incorporates the updated Minimum Standards for Safe Handling and Live Release Procedures in Annex I that were endorsed by the IOTC Scientific Committee in 2025 (SC28.17 (para. 121)):

  "The SC **NOTED** that in 2024, the WPEB recommended the adoption of a revised set of handling guidelines for mobulids while **NOTING** that work was required to further develop the guidelines for gillnets. The SC **NOTED** that the WPEB worked to further develop these guidelines which were revised and adopted. The SC **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission consider these revised handling guidelines for mobulids for consideration for adoption in 2026. The details of the suggested revisions to the handling procedures can be found in Appendix XVVI of the WPEB report."

- It improves the structure of legislative drafting of the Resolution, and partially aligns it with Resolution 25/08 *On the conservation of sharks caught in association with fisheries managed by IOTC*.

- It removes the expired derogation from the retention ban for mobulid rays caught in artisanal fisheries (for local consumption) that is not applicable anymore.

It updates the scientific provisions and timelines of the Resolution, in particular with respect to mobulid ray sampling plans.

RESOLUTION 19/03

ON THE CONSERVATION OF MOBULID RAYS CAUGHT IN ASSOCIATION WITH FISHERIES IN THE IOTC AREA OF COMPETENCE

Keywords: Mobula Rays, Manta Rays, Conservation,

The Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC),

RECOGNISING Resolution 12/01 *On the implementation of the Precautionary Approach* calls on IOTC Contracting Parties and Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties to apply the precautionary approach when managing tuna and tuna-like species in accordance with Article 5 of the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement and that, for sound fisheries management, such an approach applies also within areas under national jurisdiction;

RECALLING IOTC Resolution 05/05 *Concerning the conservation of sharks caught in association with fisheries managed by IOTC* [superseded by Resolution 17/05 then by Resolution 25/08];

CONSIDERING that the species of the family Mobulidae, which includes manta rays and mobula rays (hereinafter mobulid rays), are extremely vulnerable to overfishing as they are slow-growing, late sexual maturity, have long gestation periods, and often give birth to only a few pups;

RECOGNISING the ecological and cultural significance of mobulid rays in the Indian Ocean;

CONCERNED about the possible impacts on these species by the different fisheries occurring from coastal areas to the high seas;

CONSIDERING that the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) International Plan of Action for Sharks calls on States to cooperate through regional fisheries management organizations to ensure the sustainability of shark stocks;

CONCERNED by the lack of complete and accurate data reporting concerning fishing activities on non-targeted species;

RECOGNIZING the need to improve the collection of species-specific data on catch, catch rates, release, discards, and trade as a basis for improving the conservation and management of mobulid rays stocks;

NOTING that the mobulid rays are listed in Appendix I and Appendix II of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) and the range States to a migratory species shall endeavour to strictly protect them;

FURTHER NOTING that the mobulid rays are also listed in Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) for which trade shall be closely controlled under specific conditions including, *inter alia*, that trade will not be detrimental to the survival of the species in the wild;

ACKNOWLEDGING that the Scientific Committee (SC21) recently noted the declines of these species across the Indian Ocean and RECOMMEND that management actions, such as no-retention measures amongst other, are required and must be immediately adopted;

1. ADOPTS, in accordance with the provisions of Article IX, paragraph 1 of the IOTC Agreement, the following:This Resolution shall apply to all fishing vessels flying the flag of a Contracting Party or Cooperating Non-Contracting Party (hereinafter referred to collectively as CPCs), and on the IOTC record of fishing vessels or authorized to fish for tuna and tuna like species managed by the IOTC.CPCs shall prohibit all vessels from intentionally setting any gear type for targeted fishing of mobulid rays in the IOTC Area of Competence, if the animal is sighted prior to commencement of the set.

2. CPCs shall prohibit all vessels retaining onboard, transhipping, landing, storing, any part or whole carcass of mobulid rays caught in the IOTC Area of Competence.

3. Provisions of paragraphs 2 and 3 above do not apply to fishing vessels carrying out subsistence fishery[1] that, anyhow, shall not be selling or offering for sale any part or whole carcass of mobulid rays.

CPCs shall require all their fishing vessels, other than those carrying out subsistence fishery, to promptly release alive and unharmed, to the extent practicable, mobulid rays as soon as they are seen in the net, on the hook, or on the deck, and do it in a manner that will result in the least possible harm to the individuals captured. The handling procedures detailed in **Annex I**, ~~while taking into consideration the safety of the crew~~ shall be implemented and followed.

4. Notwithstanding paragraph3, in the case of mobulid rays that are unintentionally caught by and frozen as part of a purse seine vessel's operation, the vessel must surrender the whole mobulid ray to the responsible governmental authorities, or other competent authority, or discard them at the point of landing. Mobulid rays surrendered in this manner may not be sold or bartered but may be donated for purposes of domestic human consumption.

5. Notwithstanding paragraph 3, in the case of mobulid rays that are unintentionally caught by artisanal fishing[2], the vessel should report the information on the accidental catch to the responsible governmental authorities, or other competent authority, at the point of landing. Mobulid rays unintentionally caught may only be used for purposes of local consumption. This derogation will expire in 1 January 2022.

6. CPCs shall report the information and data collected on interactions (i.e. number of discards and releases) with mobulid rays by vessels through logbooks and/or through observer programs. The data shall be provided to the IOTC Secretariat by 30 June of the following year, and according to the timelines specified in Resolution 15/02 (or any subsequent revision).

CPCs shall ensure that fishermen are aware of and use proper mitigation, identification, handling and releasing techniques and keep on board all necessary equipment for the release of mobulid rays in accordance with the handling guidelines of **Annex 1**.

7. Recreational and sport fishing shall release alive all caught mobulid rays and shall not be entitled to retaining onboard, transhipping, landing, storing, selling, or offering for sale any part or whole carcass of mobulid rays.

[1] A subsistence fishery is a fishery where the fish caught are consumed directly by the families of the fishers rather than being bought by middle-(wo)men and sold at the next larger market, per the FAO Guidelines for the routine collection of capture fishery data. FAO Fisheries Technical Paper. No. 382. Rome, FAO. 1999. 113p.

[2] Artisanal fishing: fisheries other than longline or surface fisheries (i.e. purse seines, pole & line, gillnet fisheries, hand-line and trolling vessels), registered in the IOTC Record of Authorized Vessels (DEFINITION in footnote 1 of Res. 15/02).

8. ~~CPCs, unless~~ clearly demonstrate that intentional and/or incidental catches of mobulids do not occur in their fisheries, shall develop, with the assistance from the IOTC Secretariat where required, sampling plans for the monitoring of the mobulid rays catches by the subsistence and artisanal fisheries. The sampling plans, including their scientific and operational rationale, shall be reported in the national scientific reports to the Scientific Committee, starting in 2020, which will provide its advice on their soundness by 2021 at the latest. The sampling plans, where required, will be implemented by the CPCs from 2022 onward taking into account the Scientific Committee advice.

9. CPCs are encouraged to investigate at-vessel and post-release mortality in mobulids including, but not exclusively, the application of satellite tagging programs that may be provisioned primarily through the national support complementing possible funds allocation from the IOTC to investigate the effectiveness of this measure.

10. The IOTC Scientific Committee shall review the status of Mobula spp. in the IOTC Area of Competence and provide management advice to the Commission in 2023 also to identify possible hot-spots for conservation and management of mobulids within and beyond EEZs.Moreover, the IOTC Scientific Committee is requested to provide, whenever considered adequate on the basis of evolving knowledge and scientific advice, further improvements to the handling procedures detailed in **Annex 1**.Scientific observers shall be allowed to collect biological samples of mobulid rays caught in the IOTC Area of Competence that are dead at haul-back, provided that the samples are a part of a research project approved by the IOTC Scientific Committee. In order to obtain the approval, a detailed document outlining the purpose of the work, number of samples intended to be collected and the spatio-temporal distribution of the sampling effect must be included in the proposal. Annual progress of the work and a final report on completion shall be presented to the SC.

11.

ANNEX 1

Live release handling procedures

1. Prohibit the gaffing of rays.

2. Prohibit the lifting of rays by the gill slits or spiracles.

3. Prohibit the punching of holes through the bodies of rays (e.g. to pass a cable through for lifting the ray).

4. Rays too large to be lifted safely by hand shall be, to the extent possible, brailed out of the net using best available method such as those recommended in document IOTC-2012-WPEB08INF07.

5. Large rays that cannot be released safely before being landed on deck, shall be returned to the water as soon as possible, preferably utilizing a ramp from the deck connecting to an opening on the side of the boat, or if no such ramp is available, lowered with a sling or net.