

Europêche tuna group slams report accusing the EU fleet of illegal fishing in the Indian Ocean

- *The so-called illegal fishing by EU vessels makes no sense in light of last week's Compliance Committee in IOTC¹ demonstrating the compliance of our fleet.*
- *The report uses non-reliable data based on estimates and assumptions to unfairly accuse the EU tuna fleet of non-compliance with rules.*

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While negotiations on tuna stocks are going in high gear in the IOTC's 26th session, one country referred to the report « Fishing outside the lines », mainly accusing EU fleets of illegal fishing. Europêche tuna group rejects the findings of this report given the fact that there was no accusation, and even no suspicion of illegal fishing from EU, Seychelles or Mauritius authorities last week in the IOTC compliance committee.

As per EU, Seychelles and Mauritius fisheries control processes, catches declared in logbooks by fishers are collected, crosschecked, by national scientific institutes with VMS (vessel monitoring system), the official fisheries positioning control tool, transmitted to the flag states and verified by their control services, sent to the EU authorities and provided to IOTC's Secretariat and Compliance Committee, to be finally published and discussed among country members. None of these authorities have accused of illegal fishing the EU, Seychelles or Mauritius, targeted by Blue Marine Foundation. Quite the contrary: many refer to the quality of purse seine data. Europêche challenges the findings of the report since it would mean that all those actors would have missed such big and obvious IUU fishing activities in no less than eight coastal states' waters, none of them claiming any illegal activity from the three fleets either.

Anne-France Mattlet, Europêche Tuna Group Director, declared: *"Before spending so much time and effort on this fallacious report, what if Blue Marine Foundation had simply contacted IOTC's Secretariat, EU, Seychelles or Mauritius authorities, contracting parties or even fishermen organisations before publishing it? Any rational and credible organisation should double check its sources or methods and consult the affected parties".* For the Europêche Tuna Group, it is clear that the report contains a number of statements which are demonstrably untrue and contrary to the fisheries reality. No fishing took place from EU vessels in any coastal state waters without agreement in place. In this context, the Europêche Tuna Group is currently studying the opportunity to mission a law firm to answer to Blue Marine Foundation's defamation if they do not take back their accusations.

Europêche reminds that the purse seine fleet is responsible for one third of yellowfin catches in the Indian Ocean and has decreased its catches by more than 20% since 2014 while the whole IOTC catches have increased by more than 6% in this period. Mrs Mattlet commented *"Let's not forget that the EU, Seychelles and Mauritius are the only main harvester that have not objected the yellowfin tuna management plan and do respect its clauses. Despite these facts, they and their associated purse seine fleets are unfairly designated by Blue Marine Foundation as "the largest contributor to overfishing" in the Indian Ocean. It is shocking to read that out of the 32 pages, the report grants only 5 lines to the*

¹ Indian Ocean Tuna Commission

denunciation of entanglement of cetaceans and the catch of 4.1 million cetaceans y gillnet, without mentioning nonetheless that those are supposed to be illegal.”

Europêche Tuna Group also argues that purse seine fleets flagged under other coastal states heavily contribute to their economies and development in a sustainable manner. Besides, any coastal state is free of entering into direct fishing agreement if it wishes to and there is nothing “clandestine” about it, as implied by the report.

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