

## A Review of the Management and Reporting Trends Related to Transshipment Occurring within the IOTC Convention Area

At-sea transshipment is a growing activity in the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) Convention Area. The IOTC Secretariat's [2019 Report on Establishing a Programme for Transshipment by Large-Scale Fishing Vessels](#) indicates that the number of reported high seas transshipment events has increased by over 94% between 2014 and 2018<sup>1</sup>. However, management and monitoring regulations have not evolved to match this growth, leaving opportunities for at-sea transshipments to be used to launder illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) caught fish and undermine the sustainable management of tuna and tuna-like resources.

The Commission's current transshipment [Resolution 18-06](#)<sup>2</sup> "expresses grave concern that a significant amount of catches by IUU fishing vessels have been transhipped under the names of duly licensed fishing vessels."<sup>i</sup> Transshipment reporting requirements were also highlighted as a priority area in the 2019 IOTC report on [Strengthening the IOTC Compliance Assessment Methodology](#) "because of the high risk associated with illegal transshipment activities to launder IUU caught fish and thus to undermine the sustainable management of tuna and tuna-like resources."<sup>3</sup> The IOTC transshipment *Resolution 18-06* requires that all transshipments occur in port but allows large scale tuna fishing vessels (LSTVs<sup>ii</sup>) to transship at sea if they are authorized by their flag CPC and comply with other specific requirements.

This paper summarizes the publicly available information on transshipment operations reported to have occurred within the IOTC Convention Area. While a robust analysis of IOTC transshipment data is difficult because of limited public access to information, the available data and trends clearly illustrate the need for more effective control and monitoring of these activities to reduce the opportunities for the introduction of illegally caught fish into the seafood supply chain. This paper therefore includes several potential improvements that could be implemented to strengthen reporting requirements and the overall IOTC management framework for transshipment.

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<sup>i</sup> A recent example is the carrier vessel "Wisdom Sea Reefer", which was allegedly involved in transshipping IUU caught fish with multiple vessels within the IOTC Convention area in 2017.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>ii</sup> Large Scale Tuna Vessels (LSTVs) – fishing vessels targeting tuna and tuna like species that are over 24m LoA and are on the IOTC Record of Authorized Vessels.

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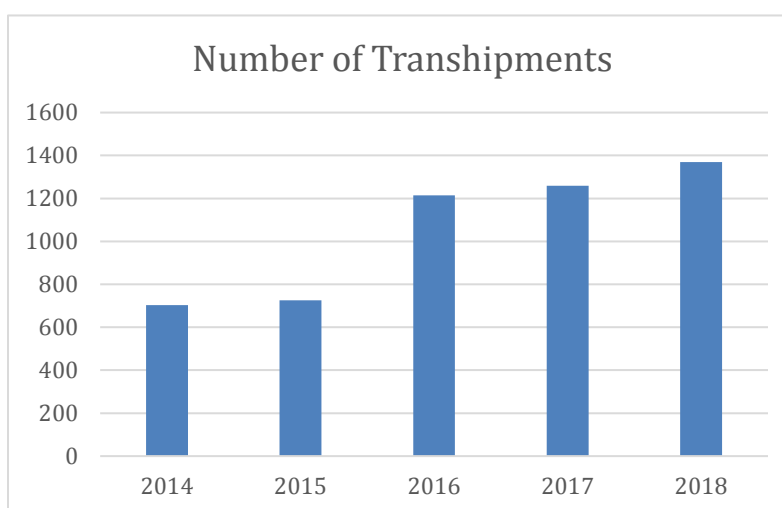
## Key Issues

1. High seas transshipment events within the IOTC Convention area are increasing;
  2. Insufficient monitoring of transshipment activities and compliance with regulations, especially for non-CPC vessels;
  3. Current loopholes in Resolution 18-06 reduce the effectiveness of the monitoring of transshipment activities; and
  4. Transshipment of some species caught in IOTC Convention area waters is not covered by the current Resolution
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### *1. High seas transshipment events within the IOTC Convention area are increasing*

The number of reported high seas transshipment events has increased by over **94%** in a recent five-year period – from 704<sup>4</sup> (later updated to 703)<sup>1</sup> transshipments in 2014 to 1,370<sup>1</sup> transshipments in 2018 (Figure 1). The quantity of fish transshipped also increased from 41,192<sup>4</sup> metric tons of fish in 2014 to 63,837<sup>1</sup> metric tons of fish in 2018. In addition to the 54% increase in quantity of fish transshipped during that period, the number of authorized carrier vessels also grew from 56<sup>4</sup> in 2014 to 80<sup>1</sup> as of April 25, 2019. According to the 2019 *Report on Establishing a Programme for Transshipment by Large-Scale Fishing Vessels*, “**2018 registered the highest level of activities in the at-sea Transshipment Programme.**”<sup>1</sup>

Figure 1: Increase of IOTC at-sea transshipment activity from 2014 to 2018<sup>1</sup>



Transshipments tend to involve high value tuna where the price is often directly proportional to freshness. Transshipments allow vessels to transfer these catches to ports quickly to retain freshness and fetch higher prices. The IOTC Secretariat reported that for the 2018 calendar year, 16,809.43 metric tons of albacore tuna, 11,637.84 metric tons of bigeye tuna, and 14,102.01 metric tons of yellowfin tuna were transshipped.<sup>1</sup> These high demand products can provide incentives for misreporting to maximize profits; as seen in the example in the in-depth review in section 2.b. of this report.

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*As transshipment events continue to increase, there is a corresponding need to ensure that each transshipment event is properly monitored and regulated by relevant authorities. The Secretariat needs to collect, review and reconcile all transshipment related information to address any potential inconsistencies. Updating Resolution 18-06 to require near real time reporting to relevant flag State, coastal State, port State, and the IOTC Secretariat will increase transparency of transshipping events within the Convention Area.*

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## *2. Insufficient monitoring of transshipment activities and compliance with regulations, especially for non-CPC vessels*

### *a. Discrepancies between the Regional Observer Programme (ROP) and Secretariat reports*

The observer summary report for calendar year 2017 noted that Vanuatu flagged carrier vessels had 28% of the observer deployments in 2017<sup>5</sup>, yet Vanuatu is currently not a CPC and has not been one since 2015. For 2017, Vanuatu flagged carrier vessels are mentioned in the observer consortium<sup>iii</sup> reports but not in the IOTC Secretariat's Report on Transshipment.<sup>6</sup> It is unclear how Vanuatu flagged carrier vessels can receive observer deployments, and thus be included in the observer consortium report but not in the Secretariat's report as they are no longer a CPC.

There are also inconsistencies within both reports for the calendar year 2018 regarding the quantities of tuna transshipped. There is an unexplained difference of 3,055 metric tons of yellowfin, 2,383 metric tons of bigeye, and 355.43 metric tons of albacore tuna between the amounts reported in the observer

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<sup>iii</sup> The Consortium of Marine Resource Assessment Group and Capricorn Fisheries is responsible for executing work under the IOTC at-sea transshipment programme. The responsibilities of the Consortium include the training and provision of qualified observers and managing the logistics for the deployment of observers.

summary and the Secretariats reports<sup>17</sup>. While there may also be discrepancies regarding other transshipment data, limited access to such data prevented a comprehensive analysis for inclusion in this brief.

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*To enable authentication of transshipment related information, observers should be required to submit reports directly to the IOTC Secretariat. A redacted version of such reports should be made available through the IOTC website in order to allow for independent verification.*

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#### *b. Possible infractions detected by the Regional Observer Programme (ROP) in 2018.*

The 2017/2018 ROP report listed 235 possible infractions by CPC LSTLVs (Largescale tuna longline fishing vessels) participating in the ROP. These infractions were summarized into seven categories: 32 possible infractions were associated with fishing authorizations (which is directly linked to authorizations to transship), 68 related to vessel monitoring systems (VMS), 58 related to logbooks, 51 related to marking of fishing gear, 12 related to mis-declarations, 13 cases of incorrect National registry numbers and one related to yellowfin quotas<sup>8</sup>. China and Taiwan, Province of China (Taiwan) recorded the most infractions with 98 and 100, respectively.

#### **In-depth review of transshipment infractions related to high value tuna**

All 12 mis-declaration infractions were made by vessels flagged to China and involved southern bluefin tuna (*Thunnus maccoyii*).<sup>8</sup> The observer reported their carrier vessel accepting transshipments of southern bluefin tuna (SBT) from seven Chinese vessels during 12 transshipments that were not included in the transshipment declarations and had no Catch Monitoring Form (CMF). The observer reported at least 16.68 metric tons of alleged transshipped southern bluefin tuna, yet neither vessels declared any southern bluefin tuna on board. This is a key example of how high value catch is misreported, as southern bluefin tuna is the third highest-priced tuna species at \$48,000 per metric ton.<sup>15</sup> It should also be noted that stocks of SBT are currently overfished. The Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT) and the IOTC have in place a memorandum of understanding regarding transshipments at sea by LSTLVs; where IOTC observers are deemed to be CCSBT observers and there is an information sharing arrangement.<sup>16</sup> However, it is unclear to what extent SBT misreporting was documented and if any executive actions were taken to deter these Chinese vessels from misreporting in the future.

While there are many infractions encountered and reported by observers, there are no reports on how these infractions are addressed. In past years, the advice from the Compliance Committee was simply to note the possible infractions, including repeated offences. *“The [Compliance Committee] noted that six of the seven fleets, which participated in the at-sea Transshipment Programme have a record of repeated possible infringements in 2017 (Taiwan, Province of China: 40; China: 10; Japan: 6; Seychelles: 3; Rep. of Korea: 3; Oman: 1).”*<sup>9</sup>

It is also important to note that there is no automatic link between the identification of possible infractions by the Regional Observer Program and examination by the IOTC’s compliance monitoring program or placement on its IUU vessel list.<sup>10</sup> Our analysis found vessel Fu Hsiang Fa No. 18 appearing in both the 2018 ROP summary of infractions and on the 2018/2017 IUU Vessels list <sup>11</sup>.

*Vessels on the IUU list should not be authorized to transship and vessels found transshipping without their authorization to fish documents should be added to the IUU vessel list. In addition, members should commit to holding discussions regarding transshipment compliance issues annually in the Compliance Committee and consider developing penalties for serious and/or persistent non-compliance. IOTC should also regularly evaluate each CPC’s ability to effectively monitor and control its vessels.*

*b. Inadequate monitoring of Non-Contracting Parties Carrier Vessels*

As of April 29, 2019, the [record of currently authorized vessels](#) listed 72 authorized carrier vessels.<sup>12</sup> Over half (51%) of the authorized carrier vessels are flagged to non-contracting parties (NCP) - Liberia, Panama, Kiribati and Singapore (Table 1).<sup>iv</sup> Currently, any NCP can register a flagged carrier vessel on the Record of Carrier Vessels, but are under no obligation to comply with IOTC regulations. There are also no mechanisms for the IOTC to review compliance or act in the event of illegal fishing/transshipment involving NCP-flagged vessels.

**Table 1: Authorized carrier vessels per flag state<sup>12</sup>**

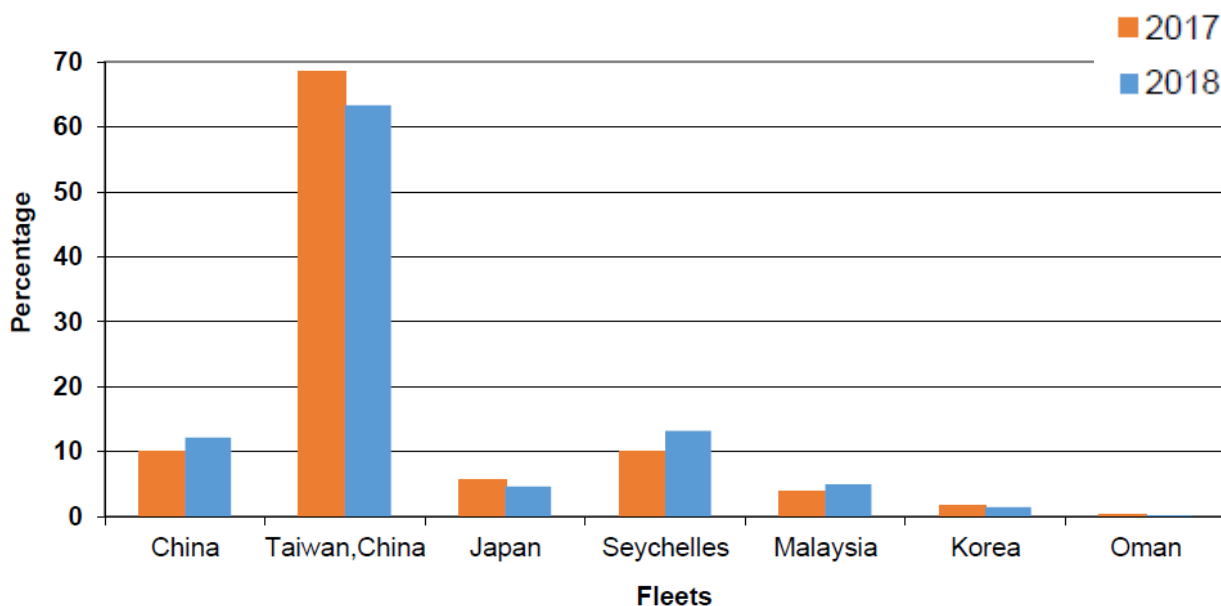
Flag	Liberia	Panama	Korea	Thailand	China	Japan	Netherlands (EU)	Iran	Kiribati	Malaysia	Maldives	Singapore
Carriers	22	13	12	8	6	4	2	1	1	1	1	1

<sup>iv</sup> Note that Liberia is listed as a cooperating NCP, while Panama, Kiribati and Singapore are not listed as cooperating parties in any capacity.

Of the authorized carrier vessels, observer Deployments occurred on Carrier Vessels (CVs) predominantly flagged to Taiwan, Province of China (30%), Liberia (19%), Malaysia (17%), Panama (16%), Republic of Korea (10%), Japan (3%), Singapore (3%) and China (1%).<sup>7</sup> Panama had the most carrier vessels actively transshipping in 2018, followed by Taiwan<sup>1</sup>, yet neither country is a CPC, so the IOTC has a very limited ability to hold them accountable for possible infractions to the Resolution.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of transshipments by the LSTLV fleet in 2018. Of the 1,370<sup>1</sup> reported transshipments from LSTLVs within the IOTC Area of Competence in 2018, 63% were from the fleet of Taiwan, Province of China, with Seychellois, Chinese, Malaysian, Japanese and Korean LSTLVs accounting for 13%, 12%, 5%, 5% and 1% respectively.<sup>7</sup> The transshipments by vessels flagged to Taiwan dwarf the combined transshipments of all other seven parties involved in the transshipment at-sea program in 2018, as is the case for previous years. These fishing vessels are not subject to IOTC obligations as Taiwan is not able to be an official party to the IOTC treaty.

Figure 2: Number of transshipments reported by LSTLVs between 2017 and 2018<sup>1</sup>




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*The IOTC should remove the ability for NCP-flagged carrier vessels to be listed on the IOTC-authorized vessel record. Only carrier and fishing vessels flagged to CPCs should be authorized to transship within the IOTC Convention Area.*

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### *3. Current loopholes in Recommendation 18-06 reduce the effectiveness of the monitoring of transshipment activities*

Revisions to the following gaps in Resolution 18-06 on *Establishing a Programme for Transshipment by Large-scale Fishing Vessels* will increase transparency of transshipment operations in the IOTC convention area.

- a. LSTLVs are the exception to the general prohibition of at-sea transshipments, yet the resolution does not include a definition for LSTLVs. This is compounded by the fact that paragraphs 19 and 21 only refer to LSTLVs and therefore applies to at-sea transshipments rather than applying equally to both at-sea and in-port transshipments. *Any future amendments to the Resolution should specifically define LSTLVs and consider clarification of the language used in Section 5 (General Provisions); to ensure they apply to both the at-sea and in-port transshipments for all LSTVs.*
- b. The Resolution does not provide for the creation of a distinct list of vessels authorized to transship; instead, any carrier or longline vessel that can fish in the Convention area is assumed to also be authorized to transship. However, Paragraph 5 of the Resolution states that CPC's "*shall determine whether or not to authorize their LSTLVs to transship at sea.*" *Having a publicly available list of fishing and carrier vessels specifically authorized to transship, along with authorization period, would allow flag States the option of only allowing vessels to fish but not transship. The Secretariat should ensure that the list of vessels authorized to conduct at-sea transshipment includes IMO numbers and is made public to leverage independent oversight.*
- c. The Resolution's notification obligations enable LSTLVs to delay transmission of the IOTC transshipment declaration to its flag state by 15 days. Considering that the transshipment declaration form only requires basic information observed during the transshipment event, it is unclear why there is an extended period for submission. *Transshipment declarations should be transmitted to all relevant authorities within 24 hours of completing the transshipment event. This will limit any opportunity to alter recorded information and allow for prompt verification of data.*
- d. Paragraph 15 dictates that the master of the carrier vessel must confirm that the LSTLV has obtained prior authorization from their flag State. This appears to be a paper-based process, without a standardized way to verify the claim. *This confirmation process would be greatly enhanced by having*

*a list of vessels authorized to transship by flag states along with the authorization period. This online list would allow carrier vessels to easily verify a fishing vessel's authorization to transship by its flag state before commencing transshipment.*

- e. Paragraph 10 requires that authorized carrier vessels install and operate a VMS. However, there is no cross referencing with [VMS Resolution 15-03](#), which requires satellite-based VMS data be reported to the flag State by all vessels on the high seas, but only by vessels greater than 24 meters when operating in their flag State's exclusive economic zone (EEZ).<sup>13</sup> This enables smaller vessels operating inside their flag EEZ to be exempt from the VMS requirements and therefore able to receive at-sea transshipments undetected. *The transshipment Resolution should require that all authorized carrier vessels report their VMS data, regardless of area of operation. To confirm their compliance with VMS requirements, carrier vessels should be required to notify the Secretariat of intent to transship and confirm that the VMS is operational and polling every hour upon entering the Convention area.*
- f. Paragraph 22.c states that *"CPCs shall require that the species covered by the Statistical Document Programs caught by LSTLVs in the IOTC area of competence, when imported into the territory of a Contracting Party, be accompanied by statistical documents validated for the vessels and a copy of the IOTC transshipment declaration."* Paragraph 24 – *"All tuna and tuna-like species and sharks landed or imported into the CPCs either unprocessed or after having been processed on board and which are transshipped, shall be accompanied by the IOTC transshipment declaration until the first sale has taken place."* This loophole allows for transshipping/importing IOTC-caught species in the ports of non-CPC's without documentation. *This language should be revised to require that transshipped products sourced from IOTC waters but landed outside the Convention Area in ports of NCPs be accompanied by transshipment declarations until the first point of sale.*
- g. Paragraph 20 and 21 refer to a 2-year pilot project that enables 8 Indonesian wooden carrier vessels to use national observers instead of the ROP. Indonesia is a member of IOTC and Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) and in 2016 its national observer program was successfully audited against the WCPFC requirements. The effectiveness of this pilot project will be evaluated at the 2019 IOTC Compliance Committee. *When considering this pilot project, the Secretariat should ensure that any national observer programs are as comprehensive as the ROP. Transshipment reports should be provided directly to the IOTC Secretariat to allow for third party verification. It should also*



*be noted that allowing such exceptions may appear unfair and if followed by other countries, undermine the integrity of this resolution.*

- h. In Annex 1, Paragraph 3, there is no guidance on which ‘competent authorities’ the transshipment declaration is to be transmitted to. *To make reporting more complete and uniform, the IOTC should require all transshipment events to be reported to the relevant flag State, coastal State, port State, and IOTC Secretariat within 24 hours. Doing so would allow the Secretariat to exercise oversight and provide a reconciliation mechanism for transshipment data received.*
- i. As seen in Annex 3, the current IOTC Transshipment declaration form does not include a field for IMO numbers and does not have a column for recording transshipments that occurred within EEZ’s or territorial waters. The lack of International Maritime Organization (IMO) number reporting is inconsistent with international standards and could hamper cross-referencing between the Record of Fishing Vessels and the Authorized List of Carrier Vessels measures. In addition, the form only requires observer signature if transshipment occurred at sea. *To meet international standards and improve reporting consistency, the IOTC should update the transshipment declaration to require IMO numbers and data fields clearly outlining transshipments geocoordinates, including those occurring within EEZs. If present, observers should also validate in-port transshipments.*

#### *4. Transshipment of some species caught in IOTC Convention area waters is not covered by the current Resolution*

Oil fish, a non-tuna species, makes up a large portion of the product transshipped in the IOTC Convention area. In 2018, it was listed as the fourth most transshipped species, accounting for 12.88% of the fish transferred.<sup>1</sup> This species is not covered by the IOTC treaty but is covered by the Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement (SIOFA), which has yet to implement a measure for transshipment at-sea, leaving a critical gap in monitoring of the catch and transfer of the species. Transshipping of this species provides an opportunity for misreporting valuable tuna species under the guise of oilfish.

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*The IOTC should consider establishing an MOU with SIOFA to share information related to species managed/caught/transshipped by either organization.*

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## Conclusion

Information sharing between transshipping vessels and relevant governing authorities is essential for verification of compliance with all applicable transshipment regulations. This paper provides recommendations that will strengthen the existing transshipment Resolution and allow IOTC to obtain and reconcile complete reports on transshipment data that can be used to support effective fisheries management and quality science. Proper reporting and improved transparency is key in deterring bad actors from moving illegally-caught fish into markets.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Report on Establishing a Programme for Transshipment by Large-Scale Fishing Vessels. Prepared by IOTC Secretariat, 30 April 2019. IOTC-2019-CoC16-04a

<https://www.iotc.org/IOTC-2019-CoC16-04aen>

<sup>2</sup> IOTC Resolution 18/06 on Establishing a Programme for Transshipment by Large-scale Fishing Vessels.

<https://www.iotc.org/documents/conservation-and-management-measures-adopted-iotc-its-22nd-session>

<sup>3</sup> Report on Strengthening the IOTC Compliance Assessment Methodology IOTC- 2019- WPICMM02- Compliance Review.

<https://www.iotc.org/IOTC-2019-WPICMM02-Compliance%20Review>

<sup>4</sup> Report on Establishing a Programme for Transshipment by Large-Scale Fishing Vessels. Prepared by IOTC Secretariat, 27 March 2015. IOTC-2015-CoC12-04a [E].

[https://www.iotc.org/sites/default/files/documents/2015/03/IOTC-2015-CoC12-04a\\_E\\_-\\_Report\\_on\\_Transshipment\\_Res\\_14-06.pdf](https://www.iotc.org/sites/default/files/documents/2015/03/IOTC-2015-CoC12-04a_E_-_Report_on_Transshipment_Res_14-06.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> A Summary of the IOTC Regional Observer Programme During 2017 IOTC Annual Contractors' Report. 26/03/2018.

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[https://www.iotc.org/sites/default/files/documents/2018/04/IOTC-2018-CoC15-04b\\_E -  
\\_IOTC ROP Contractor.pdf](https://www.iotc.org/sites/default/files/documents/2018/04/IOTC-2018-CoC15-04b_E_-_IOTC_ROP_Contractor.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Report on Establishing a Programme for Transshipment by Large-Scale Fishing Vessels. Prepared by IOTC Secretariat, 12 April 2018. IOTC-2018-CoC15-04a.

<http://www.iotc.org/documents/report-establishing-programme-transshipment-large-scale-fishing-vessels-resolution-17-06>

<sup>7</sup> A Summary of the IOTC Regional Observer Programme During 2018 IOTC Annual Contractors' Report. 25/04/2019.

[https://www.iotc.org/sites/default/files/documents/2019/05/IOTC-2019-CoC16-04b\\_E -  
\\_IOTC ROP Contractor.pdf](https://www.iotc.org/sites/default/files/documents/2019/05/IOTC-2019-CoC16-04b_E_-_IOTC_ROP_Contractor.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Summary Report on Possible Infractions Observed under the Regional Observer Programme – Year 2018.

[https://www.iotc.org/sites/default/files/documents/2019/03/2018\\_SUMMARY\\_REPORT\\_ON\\_POSSIBLE  
\\_INFRACTIONS ROPE.pdf](https://www.iotc.org/sites/default/files/documents/2019/03/2018_SUMMARY_REPORT_ON_POSSIBLE_INFRACTIONS_ROPE.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Report of the 15th Session of the Compliance Committee. Bangkok, Thailand 13–15 and 17 May 2018.

<https://www.iotc.org/sites/default/files/documents/2018/06/IOTC-2018-CoC15-RE.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> C. van der Geest. 2019. Transshipment: Strengthening Tuna RFMO Transshipment Regulations (Version 2). ISSF Technical Report 2019-03. International Seafood Sustainability Foundation, Washington, D.C., USA.

<https://iss-foundation.org/knowledge-tools/reports/technical-reports/download-info/issf-2019-03-transshipment-strengthening-tuna-rfmo-transshipment-regulations/>

<sup>11</sup>IOTC IUU Vessels List 2018/2017.

[http://www.iotc.org/sites/default/files/documents/compliance/vessel\\_lists/IUU%20lists/IUU\\_LIST\\_2018  
1207 EF.pdf](http://www.iotc.org/sites/default/files/documents/compliance/vessel_lists/IUU%20lists/IUU_LIST_2018_1207_EF.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Record of Currently Authorized Vessels.

<https://www.iotc.org/vessels/current>

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<sup>13</sup> IOTC Resolution 15/03 on the Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) Programme 2015.

<https://www.iotc.org/cmm/resolution-1503-vessel-monitoring-system-vms-programme>

<sup>14</sup> IOTC Circular / CIRCULAIRE CTOI2017-071. Information on Vessels Allegedly Involved in Illegal at-sea Transshipments.

[https://www.iotc.org/sites/default/files/documents/2017/07/Circular\\_2017-071\\_-\\_Communication\\_from\\_the\\_Fisheries\\_Agency\\_EF\\_0.pdf](https://www.iotc.org/sites/default/files/documents/2017/07/Circular_2017-071_-_Communication_from_the_Fisheries_Agency_EF_0.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> Netting Billions: A Global Valuation of Tuna.

<https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/2016/05/netting-billions-a-global-valuation-of-tuna>

<sup>16</sup> CCSBT-IOTC Memorandum of Understanding 2015.

[https://www.iotc.org/sites/default/files/documents/commission/Memorandum/CCSBT-IOTC%20MoU\\_2015%20-%20SIGNED.pdf](https://www.iotc.org/sites/default/files/documents/commission/Memorandum/CCSBT-IOTC%20MoU_2015%20-%20SIGNED.pdf)