

IOTC blacklists tuna fleet with record of IUU fishing

By Shem Oirere

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The Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) has blacklisted a fleet of tuna-fishing vessels after an Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF) investigation revealed it has a previous record of engaging in illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

The decision by the IOTC, made at its 26th session meeting in the Seychelles, was based on the investigation by the EJF that culminated in the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna banning the vessels in December 2021. Later, the vessels – the *Israr 1*, 2 and 3 – were dropped by insurers in March 2022.

The ban on the fleet is expected to support initiatives to protect the Indian and Atlantic oceans from illegal operators, and tighten measures aimed at “safeguarding irreplaceable marine ecosystems,” the EJF said.

The EJF investigation found the fleet went to extreme lengths to evade scrutiny of its illegal actions, going so far as relocating its fishing activities from one ocean to the other, changing the flag under which the vessels were operating, changing the names of the vessels, and engaging in illegal transshipment.

Some of the operators, EJF said, used “the chronic lack of transparency in fisheries to perpetrate illegal activities and decimate ocean ecosystems – this urgently needs to change.”

“I applaud both the Atlantic and Indian Ocean tuna commissions for taking action to prevent this fleet from continuing to decimate ocean ecosystems with impunity – however, tackling each illegal fleet one by one is not the solution,” EJF CEO Steve Trent said. “Cracking down on opacity by preventing the use of flags of convenience and improving port inspections, coupled with the publishing and sharing of information – such as vessel-license lists, history of offenses, and full ownership details – can help governments, regional fisheries management organizations, law-abiding fishing companies, NGOs, retailers, and even consumers to work together to rid our oceans of these damaging operators.”

The NGO reiterated there are “simple, low-cost measures which are well within the reach of any country and could play a pivotal role in the battle against illegal fishing and accompanying human rights abuse in the sector.”

Photo courtesy of the Environmental Justice Foundation



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