

Fishing Vessel Circular Letter No. 065

08 December 2023

Series: RFMO-2023

To: All Ship Owners, Operators, Deputy Registrars, Resident Agents, Representatives, and other Stakeholders

Subject: **PROHIBITION ON DISCARDS OF TROPICAL TUNAS CAUGHT BY PURSE SEINE VESSELS**

Reference: Issued in accordance with Part VIII, Section 50(1)(c) of the High Seas Fishing Act, 2013, ICCAT Recommendation 17-01

Circular Superseded: FVC-027/2018, Issued 30th January 2018

BACKGROUND

In consideration of the considerable volume of tunas that are caught by purse seine vessels targeting tropical tunas in the Atlantic Ocean area and the loss of data due to discards of tunas and other species, it is important that measures are adopted to better manage by-catch and reduce discards in ICCAT Tropical Tuna fisheries.

MANAGEMENT MEASURES

The objective for the adoption and compliance with the following measures is to achieve a substantial reduction in discards of tropical tuna fisheries.

Retention of Tuna Species

1. All purse seine vessels that are authorized to fish for tropical tunas in the ICCAT Convention area must retain on board then land or tranship to port all tropical tuna species, except in cases described in paragraph 2.
2. The procedure for the implementation of full retention requirements are as follows:
 - a. No tropical tuna caught by purse seine vessels may be discarded during the set once the net is completely closed and when more than half of the net has been retrieved. If there is a technical

problem with the closing or retrieval process of the net such that this measure cannot be applied, the crew shall make every effort to release the tunas into the water as quickly as possible.

b. The following two exceptions apply to this rule:

i. When the vessel master determines that the tropical tunas are not fit for human consumption, the following definitions shall apply:

- “Unfit for human consumption” refers to fish that:
 - Are meshed or crushed in the purse seine net; or
 - Are damaged due to depredation; or
 - Have died and decomposed in the net due to gear failure that has prevented the normal activities of retrieval of the net and fishing and effects to release the fish alive.
- “Unfit for human consumption” does not include fish that:
 - Are considered undesirable in terms of size, marketability, or species composition; or
 - Have decomposed or are contaminated because of an act or omission of the crew of the fishing vessel.

ii. When the vessel master determines that the tropical tuna species have been caught during the last set of a trip and there is not enough storage capacity to store the tropical tunas caught during this set, these fish may only be discarded if:

- The master or the crew attempt to release the tropical tunas alive as quickly as possible; and
- No other fishing operation is conducted following the discarding, until such time as the tropical tunas onboard the vessel is landed or transhipped.

3. ALL other vessels, including long liners are also encouraged to retain on board and land or, to the extent possible and in compliance with ICCAT Recommendation 16-15 on transshipment, tranship at port all tropical tunas caught, except in cases where other ICCAT measures in force or by national regulation prohibits their retention or encourage their release.

APPLICABILITY

Circulars setting out mandatory requirements shall be construed to have the same effect and applicability of rules and policies under the provisions of the HSFA 2013. Each circular is applicable to all Belize flagged fishing vessels engaged in fishing and related activities. The owner, operator and master of every Belize flagged fishing vessel shall be familiar with all applicable Circulars applying to their vessel and it shall be no defense that any person in breach of any Circular was not aware of it or has not been advised of it.

MAINTENANCE

Ship owners, and operators shall ensure that all Circulars are disseminated to their master and crew as well as any other person affected by or having an interest in the subject matter in a language understood by all. A Circular once issued shall be disseminated electronically to all stakeholders and a listing of ALL Circulars shall be published on the BHSFU website www.bhsfu.gov.bz for future reference.

COMPLIANCE AND ENFORCEMENT

Failure to comply with any Circular shall result in disciplinary actions taken in accordance with Belize's Sanction Regulations S.I. 32 of 2014

IMPLEMENTATION

This circular shall take effect immediately.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information direct all inquiries about this Circular to the Director of High Seas Fisheries of the Belize High Seas Fisheries Unit, Ministry of Finance, Government of Belize.

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