BELIZE HIGH SEAS FISHERIES UNIT
BHSFU

Keystone Building, Suite 501
304 Newtown Barracks
Belize City, Belize C.A.

+501 223-4918
+501 223-7421

www.bhsfu.gov.bz

Fishing Vessel Circular Letter No. 067
27 January 2025
Series: RFMO-2025

To:	All Ship Owners, Operators, Deputy Registrars, Resident Agents, Representatives, and other Stakeholders
Subject:	**ICCAT RECOMMENDATION 24-01 ON NON-ENTANGLING AND BIODEGRADABLE FADs**
Reference:	Issued in accordance with Part VIII 50. (1)(a) of the High Seas Fisheries Act 2013.
Supersedes:	ICCAT Recommendation 22-01

BACKGROUND

Given the ongoing 15-year rebuilding program for bigeye tuna by ICCAT CPCs, which commenced in 2020 and is set to continue until 2034 to achieve a biomass at maximum sustainable yield (B_{MSY}) with a probability greater than 50%, and in light of the ICCAT Scientific Committee's recommendation to address the fishing mortality of small yellowfin and bigeye tunas for the years 2025, 2026, and 2027, it is imperative that the Contracting Parties and other relevant entities implement conservation and management measures to ensure the sustainable management of tropical tunas. Despite the challenges faced in establishing an equitable and sustainable management framework for tropical tunas, CPCs successfully adopted a new multi-annual conservation and management program for tropical tunas in 2024. Some of the new measures adopted were the phasing out of entangling and degradable FADs. The new measure is as follows:

MANAGEMENT MEASURE

Management of FADs

To mitigate the impact of Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) and FAD fishing on pelagic and coastal ecosystems, as well as to reduce the mortality of juvenile bigeye and yellowfin tunas that gather with skipjack on FADs, the following management measures shall apply in 2025 to 2027:

- **FAD Closure**: in 2025, a FAD closure period shall be in effect for 45 days, from **March 17th to April 30th** across the entire ICCAT Convention area. The Scientific Committee for ICCAT (SCRS) will evaluate the impact of this closure in 2025 and propose any necessary modifications or additional measures at the Commission's Regular meeting that year. If no consensus is

reached on additional measures in 2025, this FAD closure will be extended to 2026 and 2027.

- **Prohibition on FAD Deployment**: CPCs are required to ensure that their vessels do not deploy any drifting FADs at least 15 days prior to the closure period.
- **FAD Limitation**: CPCs must monitor and restrict the number of FADs with operational buoys deployed by their vessels at any given time. The verification of the number of FADs should be conducted through the scrutiny of telecommunication bills by the competent authority of the respective CPC.

2025: 300 FADs per vessel
2026: 288 FADs per vessel
2027: 288 FADs per vessel

- CPCs are encouraged to refrain from increasing the total fishing effort on FADs beyond the levels observed in 2018 for their purse seine vessels.
- CPCs have the option to permit their purse seine vessels to engage in fishing activities on floating objects, provided that the vessels are equipped with either a human observer or an Electronic Monitoring System (EMS). It is mandatory for CPCs to notify the Secretariat about which vessels are conducting fishing operations on floating objects.
- Purse seine vessels, bait boats, and all support vessels are mandated to record all FAD deployments, interactions, and lost FADs in their paper or electronic logbooks.

Non-Entangling and Biodegradable FADs

To minimize the entanglement of sharks, marine turtles, or any other species, CPCs must ensure that, as at **1ST January 2025**, the design and construction of any FADs to be deployed or redeployed (i.e. must be placed in the water) in the ICCAT Convention area must comply with the following specifications in accordance with Annex 5:

- **The use of mesh net shall be prohibited for any part of a FAD.**
- **Only non-entangling FAD materials and designs shall be used.**

To reduce the amount of synthetic marine debris:

- CPCs shall only allow vessels to deploy or redeploy FADs of biodegradability Categories I, II and III as explained in Annex 5.
- CPCs shall no longer deploy any FADs of Category IV, as explained in Annex 5.
- As of 1st January 2026, CPCs shall use only FADs of Category I and II, as explained in Annex 5
- As of 1st January 2028, CPCs shall use only FADs of Category I, as explained in Annex 5.
- The use of non-biodegradable materials, particularly nylon ropes, can be used to strengthen the structure of the floating or underwater component of the FAD Categories I and II, as a temporary solution and only provided that no biodegradable alternative is available.

Please direct all queries and concerns to:
Belize High Seas Fisheries Unit
Attn: Director of High Seas Fisheries
director@bhsfu.gov.bz

Annex 5

Principles for non-entangling and biodegradable designs of dFADs

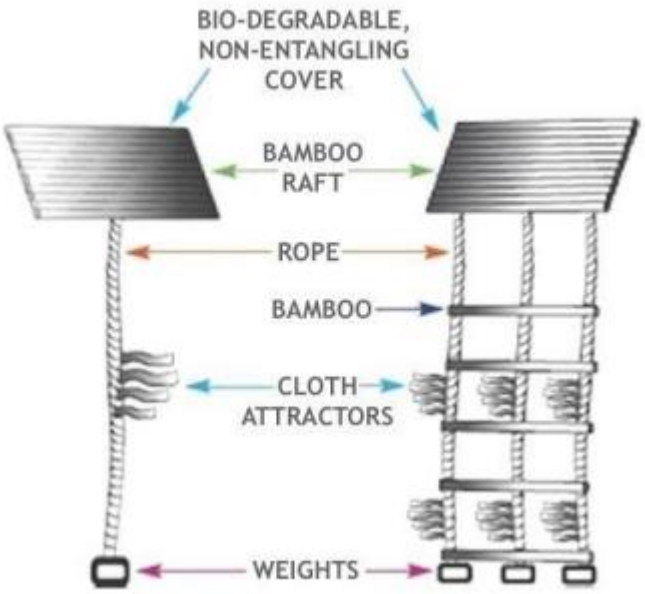

Figure. Example of a non-entangling, biodegradable FAD.

1. Fish aggregating devices shall be constructed with no netting or entangling material in both the surface structure (raft) and the submerged structure.
2. For the purposes of this Recommendation, the following FAD categories are identified, on the basis of their degree of biodegradability (from non-biodegradable to 100% biodegradable), with the understanding that the respective definitions do not apply the electronic buoys that are attached to FADs in order to track them:

Category I. The FAD is made of fully biodegradable materials.

Category II. The FAD is made of fully biodegradable materials except for plastic-based flotation components (e.g. plastic buoys, foam, purse seine corks).

Category III. The subsurface part of the FAD is made of fully biodegradable materials, whereas the surface part and any flotation components contain non-biodegradable materials (e.g. synthetic raffia, metallic frame, plastic floats, nylon ropes).

Category IV. The subsurface part of the FAD contains non-biodegradable materials, whereas the surface part is made of fully biodegradable materials, except for, possibly, flotation components.

Category V. The surface and subsurface parts of the FAD contain non-biodegradable materials.