

# Policy brief

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## EU-Mauritius SFPAs negotiations: Tuna stocks sustainability, post-covid recovery for the local sector and transparency

Brussels, 6 April 2021

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With an EU-Mauritius SFPAs Joint Committee planned this spring,<sup>1</sup> and the SFPAs protocol expiring in December 2021, this article highlights issues for the negotiations of the fisheries partnership agreement renewal: more transparency, levels of access to a realistic number of vessels, a fairer value for the tuna caught in Mauritian waters and support to small-scale fisheries sector, which is quite impacted by the Covid-19 crisis.

### 1. Overview

For several years now, Mauritius authorities have made clear that they wish to maximize the economic benefit from fisheries through the development of the national catching capacity. Mid-2020, Mauritius Minister in charge of Fisheries highlighted<sup>2</sup> that “*the fisheries sector will have to assume new roles and responsibilities in view of the challenges ahead. The Mauritius Investment Corporation (MIC) will set the base for a fishing industry on a large scale in Mauritius. The MIC will invest massively in the fishing industry, more specifically in industrial*

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<sup>1</sup> See the PECH committee newsletter from January: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/220205/Trawler%20January%202021.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> See the speech of the Minister to the Parliament: [https://blueconomy.govmu.org/Documents/BUDGET%202020\\_2021.pdf](https://blueconomy.govmu.org/Documents/BUDGET%202020_2021.pdf)

*pelagic and demersal fishing. Consequently, Mauritius plans to reduce the number of foreign fishing vessels in its EEZ, replacing them by Mauritian flagged vessels with the support of MIC and local investors.”* Many foreign fishing vessels in Mauritius EEZ have their eyes on the prized tuna. Given the state of tuna resources in the Indian Ocean region, this announcement by Mauritius that it will not contribute to increase the pressure on these stocks is welcome.

However, recent developments suggest that Mauritius may not be sticking to its plan of reducing the number of foreign fishing vessels in its waters, and in the Indian Ocean. A 2020 research<sup>3</sup> shows that Japan has been using Mauritius as a base for expanding its industrial fishing presence in the Indian Ocean and around African coast. After the change of leadership in Mauritius in 2017, a controversial fishing agreement was signed in 2018 with Japan, which the local fishers and civil society opposed. Since then, Japan fishing fleet, targeting tuna but also seemingly, whales, has taken over major fishing operations launched from Mauritius. Japanese flagged vessels seem now to account for the vast majority of large-scale industrial fishing operations launched from Mauritius. This raises questions about the will of Mauritius to harness the foreign fishing capacity deployed in its waters and effectively contribute to curb over-capacity and overfishing of tuna in the Indian Ocean. This is an issue that should be raised in the context of the dialogue with the EU on sustainable fisheries.

## 2. Levels of access have to be sustainable

It will be essential that a potential future SFPA restricts access to a realistic number of vessels. The access conditions should be fully consistent with IOTC conservation and management measures, for example ensuring that the limitations regarding the use of FADs<sup>4</sup> or supply vessels<sup>5</sup> are duly respected.

Both purse seiners and longliners could potentially compete with local Mauritian artisanal fishers on resources, and it is necessary to assess in a transparent way, these potential impacts of EU vessels catches (both targeted and bycatch) on the activities and catches of the small scale fishers, and review EU vessels access accordingly.

Furthermore, a future SFPA protocol should recognise Mauritius and other countries of the region's efforts to develop agreed Minimum Terms and Conditions for foreign fleets access (licensing, operating conditions, financial compensation), in line with the recently approved Guidelines on minimum terms and conditions for foreign fisheries access in the SWIOFC region (MTC).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> DEGNARIAN, Nishan, "Satellites Reveal Japan's Mauritius Base For Africa Fishing Operations", Forbes, 14 December 2020. Available at : <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nishandegnarain/2020/12/14/japan-vs-nature-satellites-reveal-japans-mauritius-base-for-africa-fishing-operations/>

<sup>4</sup> IOTC, "Resolution 19/02 procedures on a fish aggregating devices (FADs) management plan", 2019. Available at : <https://www.iotc.org/cmm/resolution-1902-procedures-fish-aggregating-devices-fads-management-plan>

<sup>5</sup> IOTC, "Resolution 19/01 on an interim plan for rebuilding the Indian ocean yellowfin tuna stock in the IOTC area of competence", 2019. Available at: <https://iotc.org/cmm/resolution-1901-interim-plan-rebuilding-indian-ocean-yellowfin-tuna-stock-iotc-area-competence>

<sup>6</sup> FAO, "Guidelines for minimum terms and conditions (MTC) for foreign fisheries access in the Southwest Indian Ocean Fisheries Commission (SWIOFC) region", SWIOFC/WPCCTF/19/ Inf 5 E, Maldives, 29 September 2019. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/fi/static-media/MeetingDocuments/SWIOFC/WPCCTF/Inf.5e.pdf>

### 3. What would be a fairer financial compensation?

Like the other members of SWIOFC<sup>7</sup> Mauritius feels it receives very little of the value of the tuna seasonally swimming in its waters. In the MTC, SWIOFC members highlighted that the financial compensation “*for permitting a fishing, supply or transport vessel to operate within waters under their national jurisdiction should give consideration, inter alia, to the potential catch, its potential value based on a prevailing market price, and the cost of management in regard to tuna and tuna-like species resources.*” In their view, a financial compensation in a tuna access agreement should be “*at least a minimum of twelve (12%) percent of the average prevailing market value of the tuna and tuna-like species resources.*”

The Mauritian authorities have announced a review of licensing fees and conditions for foreign vessels fishing in the EEZ of Mauritius to ensure they provide fairer returns to the country. This should be taken into consideration for the potential future SFPAs with the EU.

### 4. Sectoral support: focus on small scale fisheries and transparency

As the main supply of fresh fish for local markets, artisanal fisheries in Mauritius are critical for food security on the island, providing employment opportunities and protein to thousands of households. But both the covid-19 crisis, as well as the Wakashio oil spill brought many artisanal fishing activities to a standstill.<sup>8</sup>

Last year, to support the sector Mauritius announced a small medium enterprises (SME) financing scheme for three years, “*which includes small-scale fishing industry value chains and knocking out all trade fees for businesses that generate not more than MUR 5,000 (EUR 123).*”<sup>9</sup> Mauritius is also proposing other measures, like the use of small scale fisheries labels, and the setting up of an online fish market to link fishers and buyers, for local and international markets. Mid-2020, the Mauritian artisanal fishers union leader also highlighted some of the sector’s priorities for post-covid recovery: “*An advisory committee to listen to fishermen’s grievances, specialised schools for apprentice fishermen, more support for loan applicants and a recovery plan for the fisheries sector.*”<sup>10</sup>

Faced with the challenges of post – Covid 19 recovery, and the aftermath of the Wakashio oil spill, local fishing communities have to see concrete impacts of EU SFPAs sectoral support. It will be therefore very important to take these priorities expressed by fishers, in terms of financial support, into serious consideration.

It will be also important to ensure that, under the guise of promoting blue economy through the use of sectoral support, activities like coastal industrial aquaculture, are

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<sup>7</sup> For more information on the SWIOFC and its members, see the FAO page: <http://www.fao.org/fishery/rfb/swiofc/en>

<sup>8</sup> REJOPRA, “The sinking of the Wakashio impacts fishermen,” 5 October 2020. Available at: <https://sipanews.org/the-sinking-of-wakashio-impacts-local-fishermen/>

<sup>9</sup> OIRERE, Shem, “Mauritius charts growth path for fisheries and aquaculture sectors,” Seafood source, 9 January 2020.

Available at: <https://www.seafoodsource.com/news/supply-trade/mauritius-charts-fisheries-and-aquaculture-growth-path>

<sup>10</sup> “Budget 2020/2021 : inquiétudes du syndicat des pêcheurs,” Le Mauricien, 17 juin 2020. Available at:

<https://www.lemauricien.com/actualites/budget-2020-2021-inquietudes-du-syndicat-des-pecheurs/357379/>

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## EU-Mauritius SFPA key issues for the SFPA negotiations

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carefully analysed in terms of the pollution they generate, and the competition for space with the small-scale sector.

Fishers' demand for "*an advisory committee to listen to fishermen's grievances*" is also something to take into account for any future SFPA protocol. Information of the local stakeholders, fishers and civil society associations, about the issues arising from the potential renewal of the SFPA is key. A permanent participation mechanism should be set up for them to engage in a dialogue with the authorities during the whole duration of the protocol.

However, efficient stakeholders' participation has to be informed. A 'transparency clause', such as the one in the Mauritanian and Côte d'Ivoire agreements,<sup>11</sup> to promote the publication of all access agreements made by Mauritius, both public and private, should be included in the SFPA protocol. This is also in line with the IOTC resolution on access agreement information.<sup>12</sup> For a more effective participation, reports and minutes of the SFPA Joint committee, as well as the annual reports of the sectoral support use, should be made available to all stakeholders.

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<sup>11</sup> See Article 2 of the "Protocol on the implementation of the Fisheries Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, 2018-2024". Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1542797487650&uri=CELEX%3A22018A0731%2801%29>. And see also Articles 1.4, 1.5, 1.6 and 1.7 of the "Protocol setting out the fishing opportunities and financial contribution provided for in the Fisheries Partnership Agreement between the European Community and the Islamic Republic of Mauritania for a period of four years", available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?from=SV&uri=OJ%3AL%3A2015%3A315%3AFULL>

<sup>12</sup> IOTC, "Resolution 14/05 concerning a record of licensed foreign vessels fishing for IOTC species in the IOTC area of competence and access agreement information", 2014. Available at: <https://www.iotc.org/cmm/resolution-1405-concerning-record-licensed-foreign-vessels-fishing-iotc-species-iotc-area>