

# Indian Ocean states move to avert tuna stocks depletion

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17 Feb 2017

Tuna Fisheries are to feature prominently in future as the South West Indian Ocean (SWIO) Commission now moves to adopt a draft protocol on access to fishing grounds by foreign vessels, all intended to establish a common access regime of tuna and tuna-like species in the region.



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The draft protocol, also called the 'Regional Minimum Terms and Conditions (MTC), for granting fisheries access in the SWIO range states was endorsed in Zanzibar and is slated for approval next month during the eighth Session of the SWIOFC Commission in Madagascar. "Its main objective is to establish a common access regime for foreign fishing of tuna and tuna-like species in the SWIO region for increased sustainable socioeconomic benefits to the member states.

"It also seek to improve conservation and management of tuna and tuna-like species and effective monitoring and control of fishing activities in their respective Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ)," according to a statement issued by World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) yesterday.

The meeting was attended by Comoros, France, Kenya, Madagascar, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Somalia, South Africa and the host Tanzania.

Bank and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) also participated as observers.

The draft MTC protocol for foreign fishing access to the SWIO region is based on the draft discussion document that was prepared by WWF. Earlier, SWIOFC-WPCCTF Chairperson, Hosea Gonza Mbilinyi, said at the meeting, the delegates had unanimously adopted a regional approach to harmonise fisheries access in the waters.

"Our marine fisheries resources are faced with many challenges including over exploitation, negative impacts on our marine ecosystems, illegal fishing and climate change. All these require regional efforts and collaboration," said Mbilinyi. The chairperson underscored the importance of regional cooperation and collaboration to ensure the sustainability of shared stocks and increased socio-economic returns to the SWIO member states.

The executive secretary of the SWIOFC Aubrey Harris urged member states to share the outcomes of the meeting, most importantly the draft MTC protocol with the relevant government agencies for clearance before it is adopted by the 8th SWIOFC Commission.

WWF SWIO Regional Fisheries Programme Coordinator, Manuel Castiano, said: "We welcome this move by the SWIOFC member states and reiterate WWF commitment to walk with you all through in this journey into reality."

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