

Options for improving dFAD recovery and accountability to minimize coastal habitat damage and marine litter

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Summary

Drifting FAD (dFAD) ownership, recovery and accountability are issues that have not been fully addressed by the tuna RFMOs to date. The use of drifting fish aggregating devices (FADs) continues to threaten endangered, threatened, and protected species (ETP), as well as the broader marine environment in the form of marine litter and abandoned, lost, and discarded fishing gear (ALDFG) which can damage fragile coastal ecosystems. The impacts of abandoned, lost and discarded FADs on vulnerable marine ecosystems needs to be fully understood and measures put in place to minimise these impacts. Until the issues of accountability, FAD tracking, and transparency are addressed by the tuna RFMOs, dFAD fisheries will continue to contribute significantly to marine litter and coastal habitat damage, while giving no recourse to the coastal states whose ecosystems are harmed as a result of dFADs. This paper examines the status of dFAD ownership and recovery requirements/protocols across the tropical tuna RFMOs, evaluates the legal instruments related to dFAD accountability, and suggests various options for improved FAD management, including by improved compliance with marine debris reporting requirements, recovery of dFADs at sea, requiring dFAD owners to notify coastal states when dFADs are approaching, and development of compensatory mechanisms.