Toward true FAD deployment limits in the t-RFMOs

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Summary

All four tropical tuna RFMOs (t-RFMOs) have adopted provisions related to the proliferation of fish aggregating devices (FADs) in use by purse seine operations. Addressing the growing numbers of FADs in use has been a challenge for the t-RFMOs and remains so as a review of the provisions shows they are not restrictive at the fleet level and actually would allow a considerable number of purse seine operators to increase their FAD deployment activity. Yet the need to consider development of science-based limits on the deployment of the devices was a key conclusion of scientists at the 2017 Global FAD Science Symposium as well as participants at the 1st Joint Tuna RFMO FAD Working Group Meeting. To transition the provisions to true limitations, the t-RFMOs should improve data collection on FADs, including through the collection of buoy transmission information, and develop management objectives that clearly identify their purposes. Candidate objectives offered here include avoiding adverse impacts to tropical tuna populations (via a proxy measurement of catch-per-unit-of-effort of purse seine operations) and limiting impacts to habitat from FADs that become marine debris.