Echebastar Sustainability Working Group

Echebastar Indian Ocean Skipjack Tuna Purse Seine

MSC Certificate code: MSC-F-30029

Fourth Annual Surveillance Audit

The fourth annual audit of the MSC certified Echebastar fishery has been completed with the publication of the CAB's report (https://fisheries.msc.org/en/fisheries/echebastar-indian-ocean-purse-seine-skipjack-tuna/@@assessments).

The success of Echebastar in meeting the milestones defined in the initial certification (November 2018) has led to the closing of the original eight conditions.

However, the first three annual surveillance audits defined four new conditions due to harmonisation with other MSC certified Indian Ocean purse seine fisheries for skipjack tuna. (PIs 1.2.1, 1.2.2, 3.2.2 and 3.2.3: it is noted that the first three of these relate to a single issue). The auditors at the fourth annual surveillance audit concluded that despite progress was demonstrated by Echebastar, those four conditions remain open.

This leaves the status of the various conditions as shown in Appendix 1.

Several issues regarding the certification of the Echebastar fishery and similar fisheries in the Indian Ocean (AGAC, CFTO and ANABAC (to be confirmed)) have been the subject of comments by stakeholders. In the light of these, in Appendix 2 contains specific comments by the independent auditors that emphasise our sustainability credentials in the context of the MSC standard and the progress that has been achieved.

The recertification process for Echebastar is under way and we are confident that this will progress according to the established timelines.

Bermeo, 3rd November 2023

Appendix 1: Echebastar: Status of the Conditions to MSC Certification – November 2023

Condition number	Condition	PI	Status	PI original score	PI revised score
C1	By the fourth annual surveillance audit, the client must demonstrate that information is adequate to measure trends and support a strategy to manage impacts on ETP species	2.3.3	**CLOSED (at 3SA)**	**70**	**80**
C2	By the fourth annual surveillance audit, the client must demonstrate that FADs are highly unlikely to reduce structure and function of coral reefs to a point where there would be serious or irreversible harm.	2.4.1	**CLOSED (at 3SA)**	**70**	**90**
C3	By the third annual surveillance audit, the client must provide evidence that a partial strategy in place that is expected to result that it will be highly unlikely that derelict FADs could reduce structure and function of the coral reefs to a point where there would be serious or irreversible harm	2.4.2	**CLOSED (at 2SA)**	**75**	**80**
C4	By the fourth annual surveillance audit, the client must provide evidence that information is adequate to allow for identification of the main impacts of derelict FADs on coral reefs, and there is reliable information on the spatial extent of interaction and on the timing and location of use of the fishing gear.	2.4.3	**CLOSED**	**75**	**85**
C5	SIa. By the fourth annual surveillance audit, the client must provide evidence that the main impacts of the FADs used in the UoA/UoC on these key ecosystem elements can be inferred from existing information, and some have been investigated in detail. SId. By the fourth annual surveillance audit, the client must provide evidence that there is adequate information on the impacts of the UoA on these components to allow some of the main consequences for the ecosystem to be inferred.	2.5.3	**CLOSED (at 3SA)**	**75**	**80**
C6	By the third annual surveillance audit, the management system in the Seychelles includes consultation processes that regularly seek and accept relevant information, including local knowledge. The management system demonstrates consideration of the information obtained.	3.1.2	**CLOSED (at 3SA)**	**75**	**80**
C7	By the second annual surveillance audit, short and long-term objectives, which are consistent with achieving the outcomes expressed by MSC's Principles 1 and 2, are explicit within the fishery-specific management system.	3.2.1	**CLOSED (at 3SA)**	**75**	**90**
C8	By the third annual surveillance audit: SId. Information on the fishery's performance and management action relevant to the Seychelles fishery and private agreements is available on request, and explanations are provided for any actions or lack of action associated with findings and relevant recommendations emerging from research, monitoring, evaluation and review activity.	3.2.2	**CLOSED (at 2SA)**	**75**	Overall PI score did not changed since a new condition (C11) on a different SI was set as a result of harmonization activities

C9	By the first annual surveillance audit following recertification (anticipated to be in 2026), the client must demonstrate that the harvest strategy is responsive to the state of the stock and the elements of the harvest strategy work together towards achieving stock management objectives reflected in PI 1.1.1 SG80 (i.e., it is highly likely that the stock is above the PRI and is at or fluctuating around a level consistent with MSY).	1.2.1	**On target**	**85** *(revised to **70** in 1SA)*	**NA**
C10	By the first annual surveillance audit following recertification (anticipated to be in 2026), the client must demonstrate that available evidence indicates that the tools in use are appropriate and effective in achieving the exploitation levels required under the HCRs.	1.2.2	**On target**	**80** *(revised to **75** in 1SA)*	**NA**
C11	By the first annual surveillance audit following recertification (anticipated to be in 2026), the client fishery should demonstrate that at IOTC level, decision-making processes regarding skipjack stock management respond to important issues, specifically to skipjack catches in excess of the annual catch limit corresponding to the HCR, in a transparent, timely and adaptive manner. This could be done by implementing the harvest strategy set out in Resolution 16/02 (to be superseded by Res 21/03) and in Condition 1, or by some other means as appropriate.	3.2.2	**On target**	**75**	**75**
C12	By the fourth surveillance audit, demonstrate that “There is no evidence of systematic non-compliance.”	3.2.3	**On target**	**75**	**NA**

Appendix 2: Selected Extracts from the CAB Fourth Surveillance Audit Report

- The Echebastar Sustainability Working Group (ESWG) has been active since last surveillance audit, while the website created by the client to provide information relevant for the MSC-fishery certificate has been kept updated (https://echebastar.com/echebastar-certificada-por-msc/msc-up-to-date/).
- The client has proved that all fishing trips are observed, while the coverage for observed sets reached its peak in 2022 (91% of the total sets, 92% in FAD sets and 86% in FSC). Data is not available for all observed sets since records may be lost or contain errors and cannot be used.
- Both the UoA's landings and the updated observers' data confirm that the species composition of the catches are consistent with the data assessed during the initial evaluation and subsequent surveillance audits. Yellowfin tuna and bigeye tuna are the only 'main' primary species.
- The same data confirm that the UoA does not impact on any main secondary species, while there is a number of minor secondary species (some small tunas and mainly small bony, pelagic or neritic finfish) accounting less than 2% of the total catches.
- All Echebastar vessels have current Statement of Conformity signed by AZTI stating that they comply with the Code of Good Practices (which was included in the Standard UNE 195006:2016 as its Section 4). This Statement declares that the vessels are correctly implementing: (i) use of non-entangling FADs, (ii) release methods for associated species; (iii) data recording (of interactions with ETPs); and (iv) crew training.
- The estimated number of ETP individuals caught per set, is almost zero for all groups of species but the sharks (mainly due to the frequent interactions with the silky sharks). The estimated total number of silky sharks per set shows a decreasing trend since 2017, reaching 3,3 individuals per set.
- The study on the post-release survival rate of the silky shark performed on board one of the Echebastar vessels started in 2020 and it was finished in December 2022. *"Post-release survival rate of sharks released from purse seiners, in which best handling and release practices are implemented, was estimated by satellite POP-UP archival tagging and lactate blood levels. When the percentage of survivorship by vitality index stage was applied to predict survivorships for all sharks, a 38.13% and 39.62% survivorship was estimated for sharks bycaught and released during the first and second trip, respectively. When lactate level threshold was estimated for survivorship and used to predict survival rates, we obtained a 30.94% and 61.29% of overall survival in the first and second trip, respectively. These findings demonstrate that if best handling and release practices are applied and fauna handling/release devices are incorporated on board, a significant increase in post-release survival of sharks could be obtained on tuna purse seiners. Indeed, the survival rates obtained in this study are the maximums observed worldwide in purse seiners (close to 40% of overall survival)."*
- In 2021 Echebastar signed an agreement with AZTI for a study aimed at assessing the risk posed by derelict FADs to coral communities and if the structure and function of the impacted corals could be affected to a point where serious or irreversible damage may occur. An objective was to support a science based strategic approach to modifying the potential negative impacts of dFADs and identify possible mitigation measures. To implement the study a partnership with the NGO Save Our Seas Foundation (SOSF) was established. The research results indicated that while the impacts of derelict dFADs on coral communities is relatively

minor compared to those from other threats, they can have local effects that may affect the resilience of corals facing major global threats, such as climate change and man-made pollution. Such local effects may be mitigated if certain measures are taken and those measures are listed in the final report.

- A new MoU for the continuation of the FADWATCH project until 2025 was signed in SIOTI. SFA will play a leading role. Since the beginning of this year, the Seychelles Coastguard is using a supply vessel to collect derelict FADs. It is expected that this vessel runs at least 2 missions per year.
- The ReCon project launched in summer 2023 has the objective of recovering derelict dFAD echosounder buoys and giving them new uses in scientific and environmental activities.
- Echebastar participates in all SIOTI meetings where the issue of how to achieve effective implementation of the SKJ catch limits was discussed for incorporation in the SIOTI work plan. Members of the ESWG observed IOTC Commission meetings and the special session.
- SIOTI commissioned a consultancy on “Harvest Control Rules for the Indian Ocean Skipjack Fishery” in 2020 (Merino et al., 2020). During 2022, Echebastar continued collaborating with SIOTI and a study related to management strategy evaluation was implemented by Gorka Merino of AZTI. This led to the draft report “Study on Options for Integrating Multispecies Catch Limits in Harvest Strategies for Indian Ocean Tropical Tunas” (Merino et al., 2022). Both studies were drafted in the framework of IOTC Working Party on Tropical Tunas (WPTT).
- Echebastar provided evidence of continuous Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) position reporting for the vessels within the UoA. An indicator of this is the absence of infractions related to VMS disconnection by the Spanish management authority and the Seychelles Fishing Authority. In addition, Echebastar has voluntarily implemented the creation of an "AIS logbook" in which the captain records all instances when the AIS has been turned off for safety reasons.
- The EU is currently preparing a modification in the control regime of the fishing fleet that allows for the switching off AIS in exceptional circumstances where the skipper considers the safety of the crew to be compromised.
- Two management plans are under development aimed at improving the management of tuna fisheries in Seychelles. The first plan focuses on the development of tuna industries (stakeholders, sector strategy~~,~~ and governance strategy), while the second centres on the sustainable management of fish stocks. Both plans emphasize the importance of stakeholder participation, incorporating mechanisms for involvement through meetings, regular consultation~~,~~ and feedback contribution in the management of Seychelles' fishery resources.