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| **Media release**  | For Immediate Release |

WWF applauds Maldives for Indian Ocean’s first Marine Stewardship Council Certification

**Gland, Switzerland:** WWF congratulates the Maldives Pole and Line Skipjack Fishery today for becoming the first Indian Ocean tuna fishery to receive certification according to the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) standards. WWF has been an active supporter of the Maldives aspirations for certification, as well as an active player throughout the whole assessment and accreditation process.

"Maldivians take pride in their skipjack pole-and-line fishery – a sustainable fishery which thrived over the last millennium, by catching tuna one by one,” said Dr. Hussain Rasheed Hassan, Minister of State for Fisheries and Agriculture of the Maldives.

“The fishery forms the only viable source of employment and livelihood for more than 20,000 fishermen and their families. Maldivians are grateful and delighted that at last the world has recognized, through open and transparent scrutiny, the sustainable nature of our fishery, a fact that we have known always. We have had no doubt whatsoever that our pole-and-line skipjack tuna fishery deserves the benefits of MSC certification. We are confident that we can bridge the challenges ahead,”

“We thank all stakeholders, the MSC and our Conformity Assessment Body. We look forward working with all the stakeholders in implementing our Action Plan. We are very excited. The MSC sustainability certification of our pole-and-line fishery is a big achievement for a small nation like us." Dr. Hussain Rasheed Hassan concluded.

“Certification of this fishery constitutes an example of the benefits of improved governance focused on sustainability. The recent formal adoption of the precautionary approach by Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) member States, led by Maldives, was a clear step towards strengthening management of tuna in the Indian Ocean. This is a positive incentive for the IOTC members to continue tackling the challenges that still remain.” commented Mr Alejandro Anganuzzi, Executive Secretary of IOTC.

Approximately 25 per cent of skipjack tuna catches in the Indian Ocean are made using the pole and line method and the majority of this catch comes from the Maldives.

MSC certification is considered by WWF as a good incentive to drive tuna fisheries towards sustainable fisheries management. The Maldives Pole and Line Skipjack Fishery has been certified with eight conditions that must be met within the next five years to ensure the fishery is continuing to function sustainably. As the certified fishery seeks to meet conditions of assessment, this should result in improved management at the national level and at the IOTC level.

“We admire the Maldives for taking a leadership role in driving sustainable management of tuna fisheries in the Indian Ocean, and for their commitment to improve the management of the Indian Ocean skipjack fishery through their strong participation in the IOTC,” said Daniel Suddaby, Tuna Manager, WWF´s Smart Fishing Initiative.

“The certification of this fishery will help to make the Indian Ocean’s commercial fisheries more economically and environmentally sustainable. We look forward to further working with the Maldives government and its industry to address the challenges and make sure that all the conditions attached to the fishery’s certification are met,”

“We hope that the Maldives Pole and Line Skipjack Fishery will serve as a trigger for other tuna fishing fleets to enter the assessment process for MSC certification. This could form a core group of countries working together in the Indian Ocean with the objectives and vision of fulfilling the conditions of assessment and achieving sustainable management for skipjack.” Suddaby added.

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**Note to the editor**

* Reference points: benchmark values that helps managers decide how the fishery is performing and is often based on an indicator such as fishery stock size or the level of fishing. Fisheries scientists conduct a fishery stock assessment to provide estimates of a fishery stock size and fishing mortality over time. Reference Points serve as a standard to compare those estimates based on our understanding of the biological characteristics of the targeted species.
* Harvest control rules: pre-agreed actions to be taken by a management body designed to achieve a medium or long-term target reference point while avoiding reaching a limit reference point. Simple Harvest Control Rules can be described as an “if, then” statement. An example of a very simple Harvest Control Rule would be “*if*the fishery stock level falls below the target reference point, then the level of fishing must be reduced by 20 percent.”
* Skipjack is an important commercial and game fish, and is sold fresh, frozen, canned, dried, salted, and smoked. Skipjack is the world’s biggest fishery in terms of volume, with about 60% of principal market tuna species in 2010. Countries recording large amounts of skipjack catches include the Maldives, France, Spain, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia.
* In October 2012 the final certification report was published by the MSC and in November WWF, acting as a Stakeholder, filed an official objection. Since then WWF has worked closely with the Maldives to resolve the issues contained in the objection. Under the agreement reached, the fishery will still score well enough to be granted certification. However, the certification will now come with clearly identified and measureable conditions, relating to the development and adoption of a reference point framework and associated harvest control rules by the IOTC that must be met in the next 5 years. These are two key elements of sustainable fisheries management that have yet to be implemented by the IOTC.

For more information on the revised final assessment of the Maldives fishery, please visit [msc.org](http://www.msc.org/track-a-fishery/in-assessment/pacific/NZ_albacore_troll/assessment-downloads).

**About WWF**

WWF is one of the world's largest and most respected independent conservation organizations, with over 5 million supporters and a global network active in over 100 countries. WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the earth's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by conserving the world's biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable, and promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption. More information: [panda.org/news](http://www.panda.org/news)