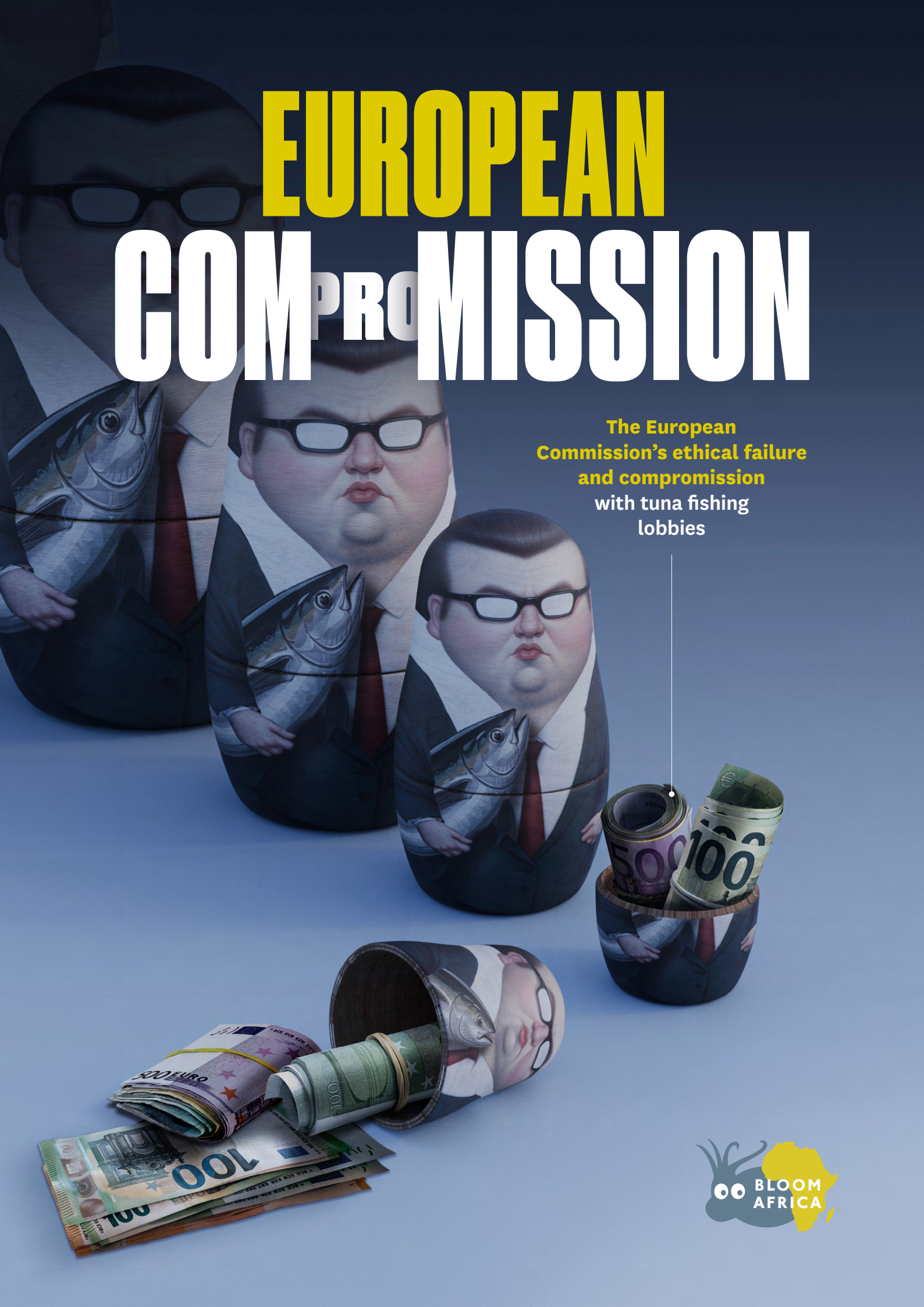
EUROPEAN COMPROMISSION

The European Commission's ethical failure and compromission with tuna fishing lobbies



BLOOM AFRICA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Compromission: the act or action of jeopardizing (as one's moral or ethical principles)
Definition provided by the Merriam-Webster dictionary

To protect less than fifty French and Spanish tuna fishing vessels, the European Commission is jeopardizing its reputation, its overall mission, and the trust that European citizens have placed in it regarding its integrity and its role as guardian of the European Treaties.

The European Commission is not a monolith: there are entire units whose work BLOOM commends, but this does not mean it is above criticism, particularly **with regard to industrial fisheries in the Global South: the European Commission — in a coordinated effort with the States of Spain and France — has entirely sided with the Franco-Spanish tuna fishing lobby, which stands out as one of the most dishonest, least transparent, most destructive, and most heavily subsidised industrial players**. The Franco-Spanish tuna fishing industry operates a fleet of forty-five very large vessels authorised to fish in the Indian Ocean. **→ see Annex**

For years, the European Commission, Spain, and France have blindly and unwaveringly supported this lobby — and in particular its **intense use of a highly destructive and contentious fishing method: drifting 'fish aggregating devices' (or FADs).** Tuna lobbies impose their neocolonial rule over the entire shared space of all the coastal States of the Global South during international negotiations, and are resorting to embarrassing maneuvers when these coastal States manage to form coalitions to reduce the impacts of FADs.

The European Commission, Spain and France form a neo-colonial triad that is highly damaging to the environment, public finances and North-South diplomacy. Together, this triad creates an oppressive climate to **ensure that no one challenge their dominion.**

In doing so, the European Commission is betraying its stated[1] promises of *"promot[ing] the general interest of the [European Union (EU)]"*, to *"protect the interests of the EU and its citizens on issues that cannot be dealt with effectively at national level"*, and to *"get technical details right by consulting experts and the public"* in order to *"enforce[...] EU law"* and *"represent[...] the EU internationally"*.

BLOOM has been campaigning for years against the unchecked power of this harmful triad by gathering evidence, raising awareness, and taking legal action against the European Commission and France. BLOOM has already secured a victory at the General Court of the European Union and is continuing its legal battle against the abuse of power by these institutional actors.

As the 30th annual meeting of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC)[2] is about to take place in the Maldives on 11–15 May 2026, **BLOOM reveals in this groundbreaking analysis that 50% of the EU's official delegations to the IOTC are made up of industry lobbyists! Our study also compares the official delegations with one another, demonstrating that, by virtue of the sheer size of its delegation, the Commission behaves like a neo-colonial power, overwhelming the representation of countries from the Global South**.

Our report also revisits the legal action we brought in 2023 against the European Commission, which is of paramount — indeed systemic — importance, as its outcome will determine whether the Commission must comply with EU law — in particular environmental law — when it claims to represent the EU in international fora, or whether it can disregard European rules and act as it pleases to support a handful of destructive Spanish and French companies.

1 https://european-union.europa.eu/institutions-law-budget/institutions-and-bodies/search-all-eu-institutions-and-bodies/european-commission_en.
2 Tuna fisheries in the Indian Ocean are managed by the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC), which was established in 1993 and is operating since 1996 within the framework of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The IOTC membership currently includes 23 Indian Ocean coastal States and six 'distant-water' fishing nations that have industrial stakes in the region (the EU, China, Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and the UK).

KEY EVENTS

- In 2023, **a group of coastal States led by Kenya put together a proposal** for a new resolution imposing a 72-day ban on drifting FADs in the Indian Ocean (such a ban already existing in the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans);
- Putting development aid in the balance, **the European Commission successfully pressured Kenya** to the point that it withdrew its proposal minutes before it was put to a vote;
- However, the European Commission failed to completely sink the proposal, **as Indonesia took over as the new sponsor of the proposal** and managed to table it for a vote;
- **The resolution was eventually adopted by a large majority** of 16 to 7 votes;
- **But the European Commission — which leads the EU delegation and therefore represents the EU in these negotiations — did not accept this democratic vote and immediately announced that it would object to the resolution,** using an IOTC rule of procedure[3] allowing any objecting country to avoid binding resolutions;
- The European Commission also deployed its diplomatic force to convince other member States to object;
- In August 2025, **before it even entered into force, the resolution became voluntary** (i.e., no longer legally binding), as 11 member States had objected to it (including the EU and France);
- **BLOOM asked both France and the EU to reconsider their objections,** so that the resolution could enter into force. **Both refused**;
- **BLOOM,** supported by our long-time partner in the UK 'Blue Marine Foundation', **appealed to the General Court of the EU and obtained a positive ruling** in July 2025: BLOOM's request was judged legally founded, and the European Commission must consider it;
- **But the European Commission, which is supported by the States of Spain and France throughout this judicial procedure, once again did not accept this result** and appealed to the Court of justice of the EU, in the hope that it will break the General Court's ruling, meaning that it would not have to reconsider its objection and therefore justify its unjustifiable support of drifting FADs;
- **The final ruling of the Court of Justice is expected later this year** and, should it uphold the General Court's ruling, the implications for the European Commission would be massive, as **it would have to account for EU environmental laws when representing the EU in international negotiations, which it obviously does not do when it comes to tuna fisheries;**
- **For the second consecutive year since 2012, there will be no proposal on drifting FADs management** being discussed during the 2026 annual IOTC meeting. This had never happened before and this absence is not serendipitous, but reflects the ongoing legal battle that we have engaged with the European Commission, Spain, and France, in parallel to the **overwhelming influence — and diplomatic pressure — of the EU** at IOTC negotiations: in 2023, many coastal States rebelled against the EU's destructive practices, and their hope got crushed by the EU and they now need to recover;
- The EU delegation has indeed been, by far, the largest delegation of all at IOTC meetings, and **industry lobbyists — chiefly French and Spanish tuna companies relying on FADs — have accounted for 50% of the EU delegation over the last decade. They are also present in other delegations such as the Seychelles and Mauritius, as well as among observers**;
- The person who stands as an observer for the industry is a key person from the French administration, who was seconded to the tuna lobby in 2022. The French Prosecutor's Office opened a still ongoing investigation at the end of 2022, following revelations by BLOOM.

3 Being under the FAO's umbrella, the IOTC functions much like any United Nations' agreement, where Resolutions (i.e., legally binding) and Recommendations (i.e., voluntary) are sought through consensus, to the extent possible, but can be put to a vote in case of unresolved dissensions. In the event of a vote (only heads of delegations or, in their absence, their alternates, can vote), a two-third majority is required, and any Member can object to a Resolution, thereby not having to enforce it. Furthermore, should one-third of the IOTC Members object to a Resolution, it becomes voluntary and no longer legally binding for all Members. FAO (1993) Agreement for the establishment of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission. https://www.fao.org/fishery/docs/DOCUMENT/iotc/Basic/IOTCA_E.pdf.

THE COSTS OF USING FADs

Introduced in the 1980s, drifting *'fish aggregating devices'* (FADs) are simple yet high-tech rafts that attract fish very effectively. In essence, **they allow fishing companies to 'gather' tuna rather than to 'hunt' them, but with an unacceptable toll on marine ecosystems: important 'by-catch' of fragile species of sharks, rays, and turtles, and severe plastic and electronic pollution along the coasts.**

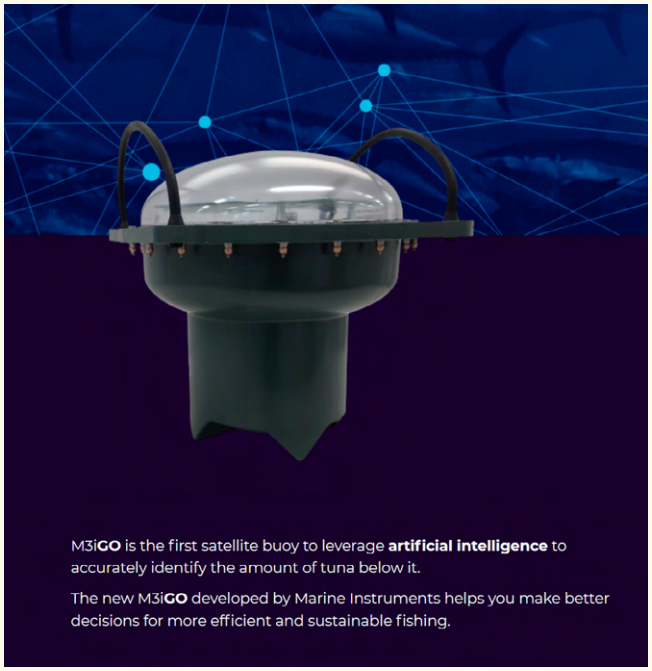


Figure 1. Example of a FAD buoy manufactured by Spanish company Marine Instruments.

Until then, tuna were caught on 'free schools', naturally formed, which generate none of the negative impacts described here.

FADs have considerably evolved over time, from mere radio transmitters deployed on natural floating objects, to highly technological buoys embarking a multi-beam sonar, an Iridium satellite transmitter, solar panels, etc. and are now coupled with costly satellite imagery and AI algorithms that identify the best fishing grounds or which FADs to retrieve.

Due to the resulting simplification of fishing activities, industrials love FADs, and their use has got out of hand in recent years: **it is estimated that 1.41 million dFAD buoys were released between 2007 and 2021.**[4] In the Indian Ocean, there are officially 15,000–20,000 FADs deployed every year, essentially by French- and Spanish-owned industrial vessels, which now rely almost exclusively on them for their catch.

Drifting FADs are harmful on two main levels:

1. **They are a major source of pollution:** although manufacturers and the industry try to sell the idea of biodegradable FADs with a bamboo structure, in reality FADs are largely made of plastic (buoys), heavy metals (batteries, solar panels, etc.), and other synthetic materials (ropes). But it is estimated that 60%[5] to 90%[6] of FADs are abandoned or lost at sea, generating a massive source of marine pollution, making them, essentially, garbage: they eventually sink (due to biological fouling[7] or wreckage) or run aground, simply because the satellite subscription paid for each buoy is so high (and so is the fuel necessary to go and retrieve them), that it is more economically-viable to deactivate them and buy new ones, instead of retrieving them.

4 Schiller *et al*. (2025) The global footprint of drifting fish aggregating devices. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.ads2902.
5 Imzilen et al. (2022) Recovery at sea of abandoned, lost or discarded drifting fish aggregating devices. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-022-00883-y.
6 Churchill (2021) Just a harmless fishing FAD — or does the use of FADs contravene international marine pollution law? https://doi.org/10.1080/00908320.2021.1901342
7 Rapid accumulation of algea, barnacles, worms, etc. on floating objects.

2. **They are a disaster for biodiversity:** up to 10% of the catches associated with FADs are made up of non-target species, such as vulnerable and fragile species of sharks, turtles, and rays. Observers often report the capture of hundreds of sharks in a single fishing trip, virtually all of which die before they can be released back into the ocean. Stranded, FADs continue to pose a threat to marine life long after they have ceased to be operated. For example, the thousands of FADs washed up along beaches form impassable barriers for sea turtles, either when they lay their eggs, or when they hatch as the young turtles cannot find their way to the sea. Attached to a coral reef, a FAD, even one made of bamboo, is also a considerable destructive force.

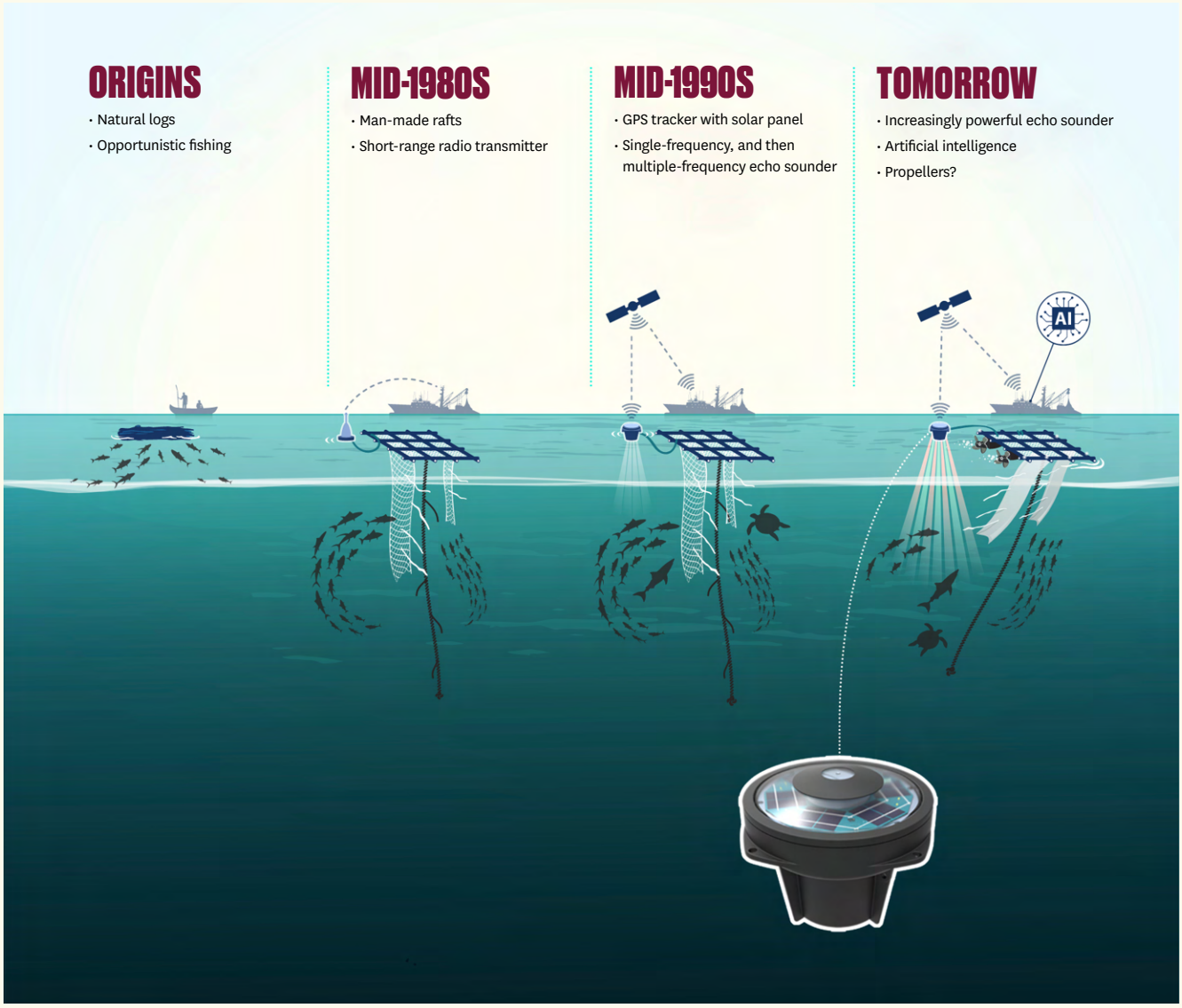
From a purely economic perspective, FADs are also senseless. As highlighted above, their deployment and operation are costly (i.e., cost of the FAD structure and buoy themselves, but also satellite subscription to track them). FADs are also responsible for a much higher proportion of juvenile fish in the catch — bought at lower prices by processing plants — than when tuna are caught in 'free schools'. In recent years, many European companies have complained about the low prices offered for these small tunas weighing less than one kilo. In essence, a choice must be made between either using FADs to easily 'gather' tuna, but high associated costs and a decreased value, or not using FADs and 'hunt' tuna (which is more difficult), with lower associated costs but an increased value. This catch-22 situation was very well put a few years ago by Mr. Adrien de Chomereau, CEO of French tuna company Sapmer: *'As few FADs as possible is the path of virtue. But it is economic suicide'.*[8]

> **'As few FADs as possible is the path of virtue. But it is economic suicide'**
>
> *Mr. Adrien de Chomereau, CEO of French tuna company Sapmer*

Since this quote, the massive use of FADs has continued, and… the '*economic suicide*' has occurred nonetheless: the situation is dire for the three French companies that target tuna in the Indian Ocean, as Via Océan/Saupiquet has filed for bankruptcy in 2024, Sapmer has sold six of its nine vessels (all built between 2009 and 2015), and CFTO has accumulated massive net losses, resulting in wages being cut by 30% and three vessels being sold as well.[9] To put it bluntly: **maintaining the current state of play — i.e., a massive use of FADs — is the economic suicide, on top of an environmental suicide.**

8 Ortscheidt (2016) La Sapmer à la croisée des chemins. https://lemarinblog.wordpress.com/2016/09/22/la-reunion-les-voyants-sont-au-vert/.

9 The situation is slightly better in Spain for some of the companies, mostly because of the widespread use of flags of convenience and associated tax optimization (see link on opposite page)).



→ To find out more about the business model of European tuna companies: read our press kit



Figure 2. Silky sharks (classified as 'vulnerable' globally) caught by a French tuna seiner in the Indian Ocean. Dead, they are attached to a winch by their caudal fin to be thrown back into the water.



Figure 3. A manta ray (classified as 'endangered' globally) caught by a French tuna seiner in the Indian Ocean. It is tied by one of its fins to a winch to be released back into the water, severely injured and likely doomed to die.



Figure 4. A whale shark (classified as 'endangered' globally) caught by a French tuna seiner in the Indian Ocean.

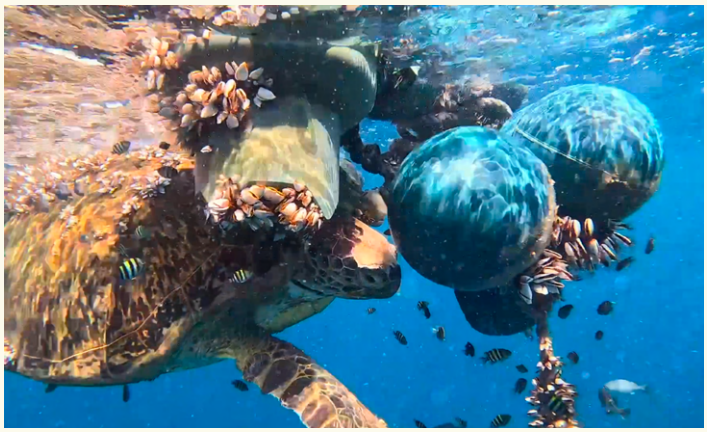


Figure 5. A turtle trapped in a FAD belonging to the TXORI ARGI, a Spanish vessel certified as 'sustainable' by the MSC. Its left front flipper has been severed and is now just a stump. All the scales on its head have been torn off by repeated impacts with the buoy. Its body is covered with barnacles (crustaceans that attach themselves to surfaces).



Figure 6. A FAD stranded on the Dapani coral reef in the Mayotte Marine Park. ©Sébastien Quaglietti / French Biodiversity Agency (OFB).



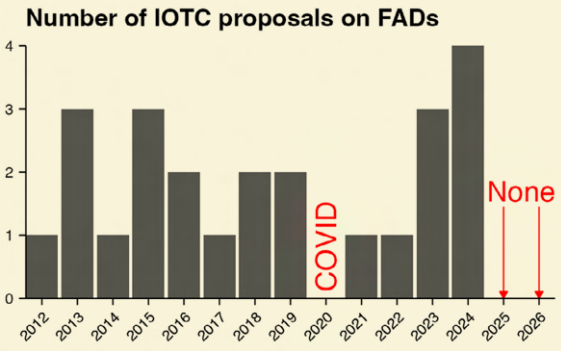
Figure 7. A FAD stranded on the Dapani coral reef in the Mayotte Marine Park. ©Sébastien Quaglietti / French Biodiversity Agency (OFB).



Figure 8. Aerial view of a beach in the Seychelles, littered with buoys from FADs belonging to European vessels.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S ANTI-ENVIRONMENTAL AND ANTI-DEMOCRATIC DIPLOMACY IN FAVOR OF INDUSTRIAL FISHING LOBBIES IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

FADs have been central to discussions since the very first annual sessions of the IOTC at the end of the 1990s: for instance, the proliferation of drifting FADs used by European companies and their negative impacts on tuna populations and the marine environment were already highlighted at the second,[10] third,[11] and fourth[12] annual meetings. The central place taken by FADs at IOTC meetings is evidenced by the number of proposals tabled each year for discussion. Since 2012, there have always been between 1 and 4 FAD proposals being discussed[13] except for the years 2025 and 2026. This absence is not serendipitous, but reflects in part the ongoing legal battle that we have engaged with the European Commission, Spain, and France, and also the **overwhelming influence — and diplomatic pressure — of the EU** at IOTC negotiations (see below).



The widely documented negative impacts of FADs on marine ecosystems should dictate a rapid and complete phase-out of this destructive fishing method.

In early 2023, a binding resolution voted at the IOTC could have changed the game in the Indian Ocean, but since then, the EU — led by the unit of the European Commission in charge of 'Trade Negotiations and Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements' —, hand-in-hand with the Spanish and French companies and their respective States, have done the exact opposite, in a blatant case of collusion between public institutions and private interests.

Below, we chronicle the events that have occurred since this vote.

A REBELLION FROM COSTAL STATES

On 5 February 2023, member States of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) adopted a long-discussed and much-needed annual 72-day ban on drifting FADs.

This democratic vote happened after a sensational twist occurred: Kenya — which had led the environmental proposal for several years — decided to withdraw it just minutes before the vote was supposed to take place.

The vote was nonetheless able to proceed thanks to Indonesia stepping up as new sponsor of the proposal to replace Kenya and allow the proposal to be put to a vote.

10 https://iotc.org/sites/default/files/documents/proceedings/1997/s/IOTC-1997-S02-R%5BEN%2BFR%5D.pdf.
11 https://iotc.org/sites/default/files/documents/proceedings/1998/s/IOTC-1998-S03-R%5BEN%5D.pdf.
12 https://iotc.org/sites/default/files/documents/proceedings/1999/s/IOTC-1999-S04-R%5BEN%5D.pdf.
13 Except for the year 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, when there was no proposal tabled.

Comments started circulating about the European Commission being behind Kenya's withdrawal to 'kill' the proposal, and having threatened Kenya with the suppression of substantial development aid should Kenya fail to withdraw the FAD ban proposal.

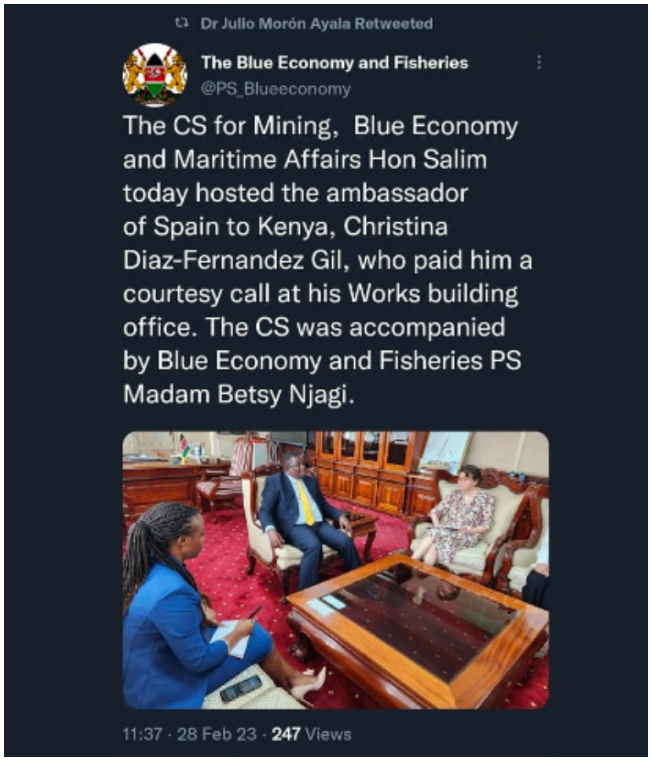
In spite of huge pressure and abnormal voting circumstances, the annual 72-day FAD ban resolution was adopted by a large majority of IOTC members (16 to 7) on 5 February 2023.

A SERIES OF OBJECTIONS UNDER THE LEAD OF THE EU

Having failed in its effort to sabotage this critical environmental measure, the European Commission then immediately announced that it would defy democracy and object to the new resolution. IOTC rules of procedure provide that an objection by a member State makes the resolution non-binding for its fleet: the EU objection would thus spare the EU fleet to abide by the FAD ban, despite the EU fleet being the main user of FADs in the Indian Ocean.

Having announced its intention to object, the European Commission went even further to get the resolution simply and purely annulled: it used its diplomatic weight to obtain that 10 other member States (including Kenya, which had initiated the proposal!) object as well.

In fact, Kenya's spectacular U-turn is the most shocking event, as the country went from leading the proposal for the last three years on the annual 72-day ban on d-FADs to objecting to its own proposal, in a matter of days. We already knew that the EU was behind the initial withdrawal of Kenya's proposal, but **it quickly became clear that the EU had decided to punish Kenya for its willingness to advance an ecological agenda:** shortly before Kenya objected to its own resolution, Kenyan departments of 'Mining, Blue Economy and Maritime Affairs' and 'Blue Economy and Fisheries' indeed met with the Spanish ambassador in Kenya, a 'courtesy call' that was liked and retweeted by a few key people; among others, Mr. Julio Morón Ayala, head of Spanish tuna companies' union OPAGAC, and Mr. Javier Garat Pérez, key shareholder of the EU's largest tuna fishing company Albacora and head of the industrial fisheries' lobby Europêche (see below).
In a Fisheries Committee meeting organized by EU parliamentarians on 1 March to hear the position of the European Commission on the matter, Spanish member of the European People's Party (EPP), Mr. Francisco José Millán Mon, even announced that Kenya had already objected, even though the objection was only made public by the IOTC on the following day, on 2 March! Interestingly, this objection was filed by the ministry of Mining, Blue Economy and Maritime Affairs, although it is the Kenyan fisheries services that communicates regarding IOTC matters.



→ Read the report 'Lining up the ducks — Industrial tuna fishing lobbies line up their political allies to defend their destructive practices in Africa'

The EU's sustained efforts and anti-democratic maneuvers in favor of its industrial fishing lobbies paid off: in August 2023, the resolution was annulled before it even entered into force, as the threshold of 11 objections was reached.

A LONG LEGAL BATTLE THAT WE MIGHT SOON BE WINNING

In the meantime, on 5 April 2023, BLOOM had stepped in to oppose the scandalous attitude of the EU. We formally asked both France (a full member to the IOTC in virtue of its 'Scattered Islands' overseas territories) and the European Commission to withdraw their objection in order to allow for the annual ban to enter into force.

As France and the EU refused to consider our demand, **we appealed to the General Court of the EU[14] and before the French '*Conseil d'État*' (i.e., France's supreme administrative jurisdiction).**

Our appeal to the General Court was supported by our UK colleagues Blue Marine Foundation, while the European Commission was supported by the States of Spain and France.

In July 2025, BLOOM won in court against the European Commission, as the General Court judged that BLOOM's request was legitimate.[15]

However, instead of reconsidering its objection, **the European Commission chose to escalate to the Court of justice of the EU in an attempt to get this judgment annulled.**

In parallel, the French administrative court (the *'Conseil d'État'*) is awaiting the Court of justice of the EU's decision.

A FUNDAMENTAL DEMOCRATIC ISSUE AT STAKE

What may appear as a technical legal saga — proposal, resolution, objection, General Court, and now the Court of Justice of the EU — is in fact **a fundamental democratic issue. At stake is a simple but decisive question: can the European Commission elude accountability for its actions on the international stage, in stark contradiction with the environmental laws it has adopted over decades?**

If the Court of Justice upholds the General Court's ruling, the European Commission will no longer be able to hide behind procedural arguments. **It will be compelled to justify the substance of its objection to the IOTC resolution on FADs — something it has, from the onset, systematically refused to do.** Such a judgment would have far-reaching consequences, not only for EU environmental policy, but for the integrity of EU action across all domains, including health, social, and economic policies.

The Commission claims that its objection has no legal consequences within the EU. But this argument is deeply misleading. It is precisely because the European Commission objected to the resolution that EU law remains unaffected. Had it not done so, the consequences would have been immediate and substantial; a point that was explicitly acknowledged by the General Court during a hearing in February 2025.

By insisting that its objection carries no legal implications, the European Commission is effectively asserting that its conduct in international fora can escape any meaningful legal scrutiny. In other words, it is claiming that what it does beyond EU borders does not have to comply with EU law. If upheld, the General Court's ruling would firmly reject this position. It would establish that the European Commission cannot operate in a legal vacuum when negotiating internationally, that it remains bound by EU law, regardless of the forum in which it acts.

The implications are profound. For the European Commission, the stakes could not be higher. For coastal States in the Indian Ocean, this could be the beginning of the end of the EU's colonial bullying.

14 https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C_202400461.

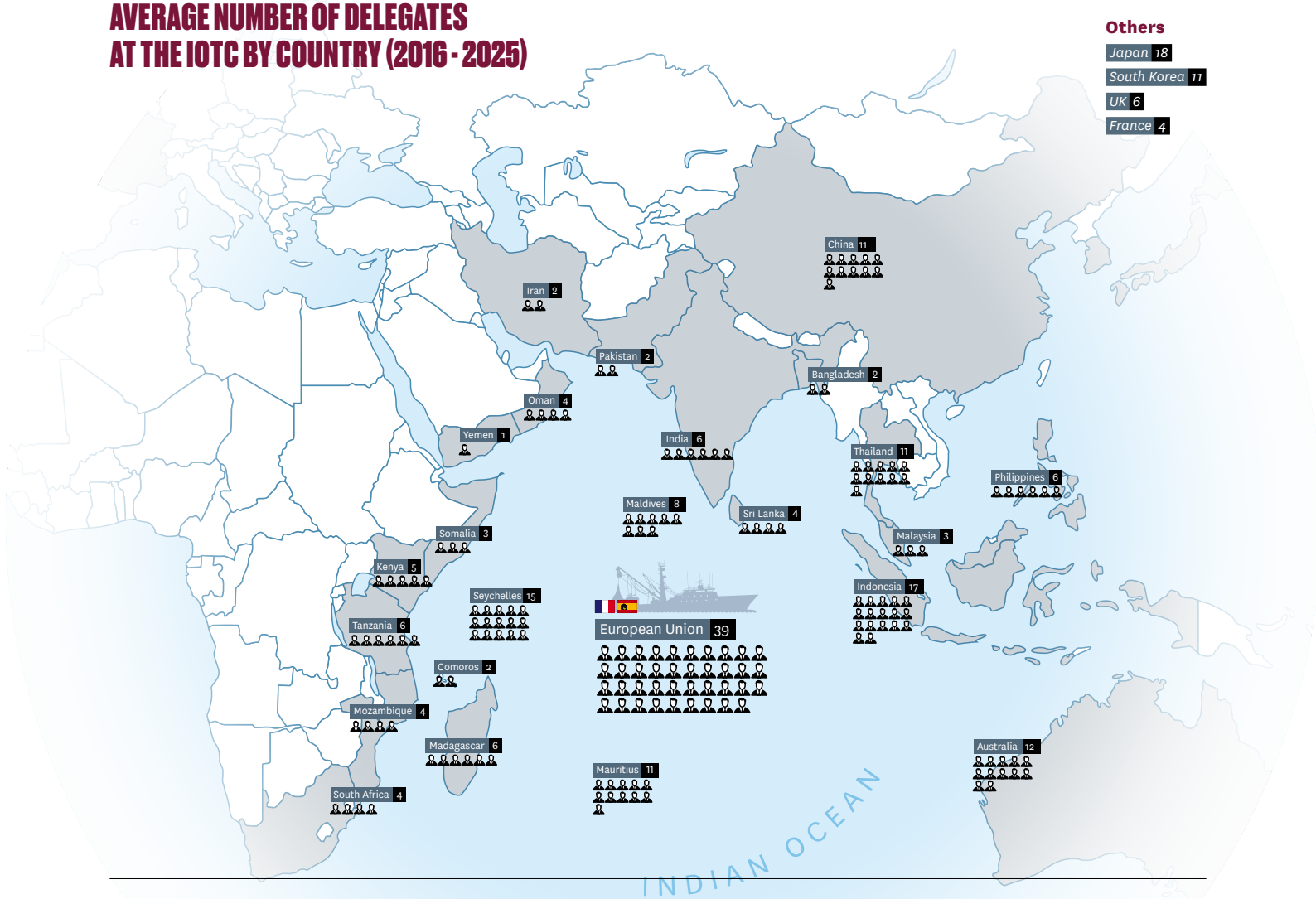
15 https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:62023TJ1049.

AN OVERWHELMING DELEGATION OF INDUSTRY LOBBIES

The EU has historically been and remains, by far, the **most dominant delegation taking part in negotiations at the IOTC:**[16] in the 29 years of existence of the IOTC, the was the largest delegation 23 times. When it was not (six times), it was the second largest delegation. Over the last decade, the EU on its own has accounted for 18% of all IOTC delegates, with an average of **39 delegates per year.**[17] This figure is as large as the **combined delegations of Bangladesh, Comoros, France, Iran, Kenya, Malaysia, Mozambique, Oman, Pakistan, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, and Yemen,** which stresses the tremendous diplomatic force that the EU is willing to deploy to **negotiate for its industry,** compared to the coastal States that actually constitute the IOTC area.

→ Read the report 'The EU under the rule of tuna lobbies — Ground-breaking revelations on the domination of tuna lobbies and the involvement of public powers in the pillaging of African waters'

AVERAGE NUMBER OF DELEGATES AT THE IOTC BY COUNTRY (2016 - 2025)



16 Members of the IOTC are represented at the various meetings by *"a single delegate who may be accompanied by an alternate and by experts and advisers"*, but it is up to members to set the composition and size of their delegations, without any formal restriction. FAO (1993) Agreement for the establishment of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission. https://www.fao.org/fishery/docs/DOCUMENT/iotc/Basic/IOTCA_E.pdf.

17 The second largest delegation, Japan (another 'distant', non-Indian Ocean State similarly to the EU block), only accounted for 8% of the delegates, with an average of 18 delegates per year (Japan also being a member of the IOTC since its inception in 1996, similarly to the EU).

UBIQUITOUS FRENCH AND SPANISH TUNA LOBBIES

The EU delegation is not only problematic due to its size, but also due to its composition: the French and Spanish tuna lobbies that strongly depend on drifting FADs for their operation, are very prominent in the EU delegation. Over the last 10 years, between 2016 and 2025, the fishing industry has accounted for 50% of the EU delegation, with 20 lobbyists per year on average, but **in particular, the purse seine industry alone has accounted for 78% of the fishing industry representatives (i.e., 16 out of 20), and 40% of all delegates:**

- For the French tuna industry, lobbyists from Sapmer (3.2 per year, on average) and CFTO (2.3) are listed as EU delegates, along with other lobbyists from Orthongel (2.3), their national representative;

- For the Spanish tuna industry, lobbyists from Echebastar (1.5), Atunsa (0.7), Inpesca (0.7), Albacora (0.6), Bolton Foods (0.6), Pevasa (0.6), and Compañia Europea de Tunidos (0.2) are present, along with lobbyists from Anabac (1.5) and Opagac (1.3), their national representatives;

- Interestingly, there are also a number of lobbyists from FAD manufacturers and providers in the EU delegation, which are tightly linked to the purse seine industry: Zunibal (0.6), Marine Instruments (0.3), and CLS (0.2). Note that all these FAD providers also promote their 'monitoring, control, and surveillance' capacity, so it is impossible to separate which lobbying activity they are conducting at a given moment:[18] **are they supporting the tuna industry and would rather avoid any constraint on FAD management, so that they can continue selling ever-costlier solutions; or are they supporting coastal States to monitor fishing activities in their economic zones?**

These figures are conservative, as other lobbyists with obvious links with tuna lobbies are also present in the EU delegation, such as Marc Ghiglia, who represents the French UAPF (for *'Union des armateurs à la pêche de France'*), whose Chair is Mr. Xavier Leduc (also Orthongel's Chair and EU delegate), and whose treasurer is either Mr. Pierre-Alain Carré (CFTO's director and EU delegate) or Adrien de Chomereau (Sapmer's director and EU delegate), depending on the source.[19]

The problem does not end here: French and Spanish tuna lobbyists have also penetrated other delegations, increasing their reach and influence in IOTC negotiations: in the Seychelles (Inpesca, 1.2 per year, on average; Echebastar, 1.0; Albacora, 0.7; Pevasa, 0.6; Opagac, 0.3; Sapmer, 0.2; Atunsa, 0.2), but also to a lower extent in Mauritius (Sapmer, 0.3; Echebastar, 0.1), and Tanzania (Albacora, 0.1).

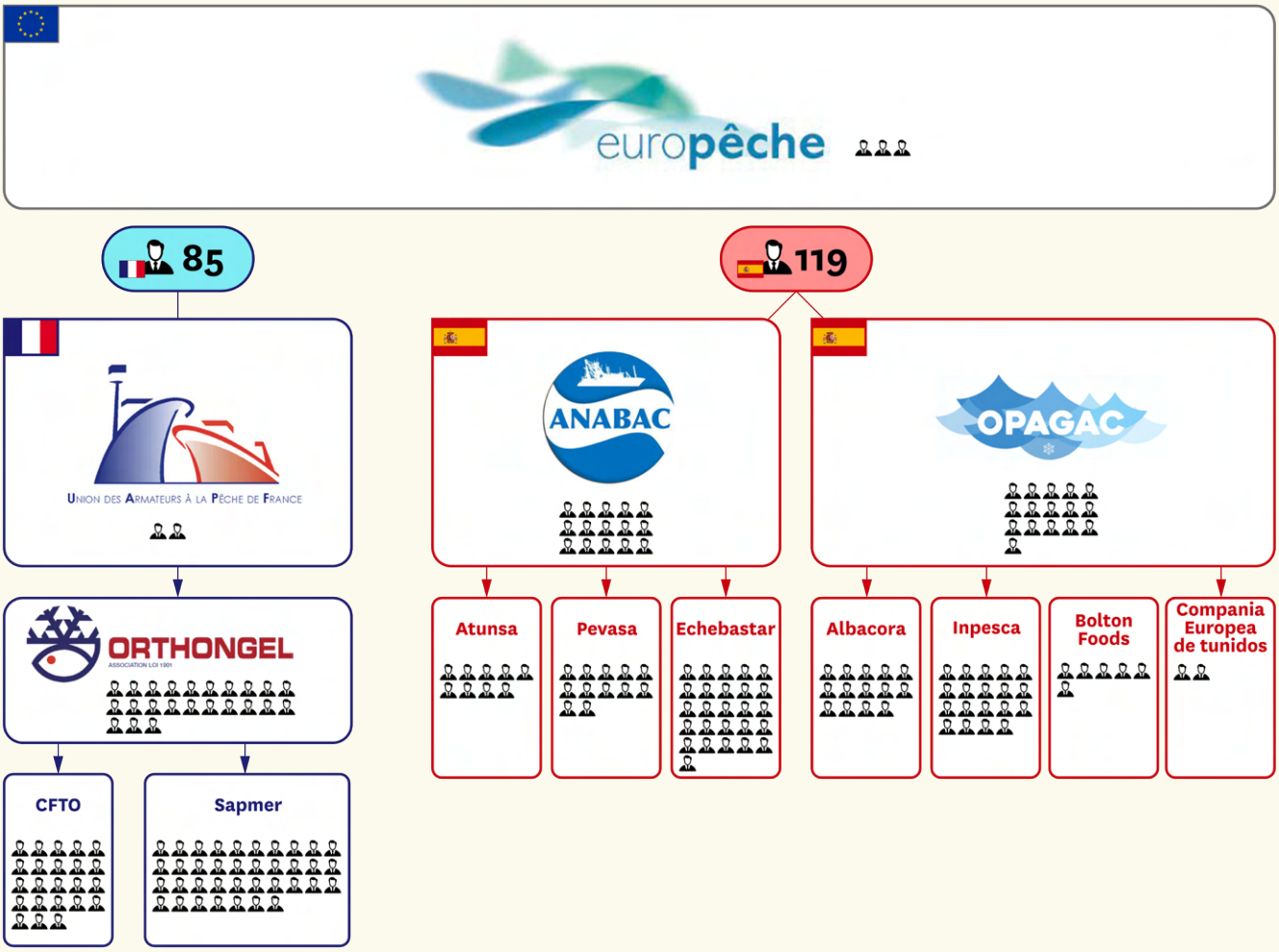
Finally, the lobby that aggregates all these national lobbies and individual companies at the European level, Europêche, also has an observer status (which BLOOM obtained in 2023 after Oman and two other unknown States tried to oppose it). The link between French and Spanish tuna companies and Europêche is conspicuous, as it is Europêche's 'tuna group' director, Ms. Anne-France Mattlet (see below), who is the lobby's representative at the IOTC.[20] Europêche is further chaired by Mr. Javier Garat Pérez,[21] one of Albacora's key shareholders[22] and former Board member.[23] On Europêche's website, Mr. Garat Pérez is presented as Secretary General of Cepesca, which is Chaired by Mr. Julio Morón Ayala,[24] Opagac's Director.[25] Furthermore, one of Europêche's vice Chair is Mr. Marc Ghiglia (see above), and the second one is Mr. Gerard van Balsfoort, advisor and former Chair of the Pelagic freezer trawler association (PFA),[26] whose central member — the Dutch multinational company Parlevliet & van der Plas — owns France's largest tuna company CFTO.[27]

→ Read the report 'The Big Five: the grip of five Dutch corporate giants on the Global Ocean'

18 For instance, CLS abundantly highlighted its 'monitoring, control, and surveillance' capacity on its website (https://www.cls.fr/solutions/gestion-durable-des-peches/), but CLS is also the provider of the drifting FAD 'CATSAT' solution (https://www.catsat.com/catsat-v6/), which is not reported at all on CLS's main website.
19 Adrien de Chomereau according to UAPF's 2024-2025 activity report (https://uapf.org/rapport-activite-uapf-2024-2025/); Pierre-Alain Carré according to UAPF's website (https://uapf.org/gouvernance-organisation/).
20 https://europeche.chil.me/europeche/team.
21 https://europeche.chil.me/europeche/team.
22 https://cepesca.es/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/CV_JAVIER_GARAT_ESP_2.06.2022.pdf.
23 https://cepesca-old.chil.me/download-doc/87586.
24 https://cepesca.es/sobre-cepesca/.
25 https://ouroceanpanama2023.gob.pa/speakers/julio-moron/.
26 https://www.pelagicfish.eu/our-members/.
27 http://pp-group.nl/en-us/about-parlevliet-van-der-plas.

MAP OF THE SMALL YET POWERFUL FRENCH AND SPANISH TUNA INDUSTRIES

→ Map of direct interests representing European tuna seiners in the IOTC delegations between 2016 and 2025.



COLLUSION AND CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS AT THE HEART OF IOTC NEGOTIATIONS

Between 'changing industry practices and aim for sustainable fisheries', or 'torpedoing regulations to maintain destructive and polluting practices', France (and by extension, the EU) has chosen the latter.

Ms. Anne-France Mattlet is the person that epitomizes the collusion between European policy makers and tuna lobbies. Until 2022, she was a key person of the French administration, chairing France's delegation at the IOTC in 2018 and 2019,[28] and also chairing the IOTC's Compliance Committee in 2020 and 2021.[29] On 1 April 2022, however, — this is not an April's fool — **she was seconded to the French tuna lobby, Orthongel, which then made her available to the European fishing lobby Europêche to lead its newly created 'tuna group'.** Her secondment was renewed by the French administration in April 2025. She now also serves as Europêche's deputy executive director, and sits as an observer at IOTC meetings,[30] while still reporting to the French administration, in **a blatant conflict of interests that BLOOM took to court under criminal charges along with the French anti-corruption NGO Anticor.**

Europêche's 'tuna group' was created at the end of 2021 and was co-chaired by Mr. Xavier Leduc (Orthongel), Mr. Julio Morón Ayala (Opagac) et Mr. Borja Soroa (Anabac) until Ms. Mattlet's was recruited. It gathers these three structures, which own and operate tropical tuna purse seiners across the globe. The 'tuna group' was created *"to defend the common interests of all vessels operated by these companies, whether flying a European flag or a third-country flag"*.

Orthongel's description of Ms. Mattlet's qualifications speaks volumes about the conflicts of interests that she embodies: *"After two years heading the 'Supervision and Control of Maritime Activities' unit [...], she spent four years at the [French] Directorate of Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture, where she oversaw fishing agreements with Nordic countries as well as those in the Indian Ocean. Thus, with over five years of experience working on international ocean governance and tuna-related policies within the French administration,* ***Anne-France Mattlet has developed a deep understanding of the decision-making process for tuna fishing policies".***

Orthongel also identifies as the 'tuna group' and therefore Ms. Mattlet's top priority objective for the years 2022–2023 the ***"revision of the fisheries control regulation",*** given that *"the 'margin of tolerance' in the current control regulation has been identified as one of the main issues threatening the survival of the EU fleet. The current provisions penalize EU shipowners, who face systematic sanctions, point deductions, and even risk losing their licenses due to the impossibility of complying with a rule that is unenforceable for the industry in its current form. The amendment proposed by Europêche in 2021 (to apply the margin of tolerance to the total quantity retained on board) will be defended by the 'tuna group'".* In other words, **the clear objective of this secondment was to secure the dismissal of an infringement procedure** initiated by the European Commission's legal services against France for violating this regulation. This objective was achieved, through close collaboration between France and the tuna lobby, since the fisheries control regulation was indeed weakened to the explicit benefit of tropical tuna vessels, and the infringement procedure against France was abandoned. **There is no longer any distinction between the French State and the tuna industry it is supposed to regulate. This institutionalised collusion has already 'paid off' for the fishing industry, as the European fisheries control regulation has effectively been watered down to the explicit benefit of tropical tuna vessels.**

The former 'margin of tolerance' was *"unenforceable"* precisely because of the intense use of FADs by European companies. But instead of changing their practices (by phasing out the use of FADs) to truly achieve *"environmentally and socially responsible manners"* claimed by the industry, the tuna lobby — hand in hand with the French administration — therefore chose to torpedo the European framework, in a move that is perfectly in line with the unwavering support of FADs by the European Commission's unit that is leading the negotiations in the IOTC on behalf of the EU.

→ Read the report 'The wild west of tuna fisheries in Africa — The sheer power of an outlawed industrial sector. The guilt of a complicit administration'

28 Member of the EU delegation in 2017; Head of the French delegation in 2018 and 2019; Member of the French delegation in 2020 and 2021.
29 Vice-Chair in 2017, 2018, and 2019; Chair in 2020 and 2021.
30 In 2023, 2024, and 2025.

CONCLUSIONS

The situation in the Indian Ocean appears intractable, given how widely divergent the interests of the various parties are, with radically opposing views sometimes emerging even within the same institution.

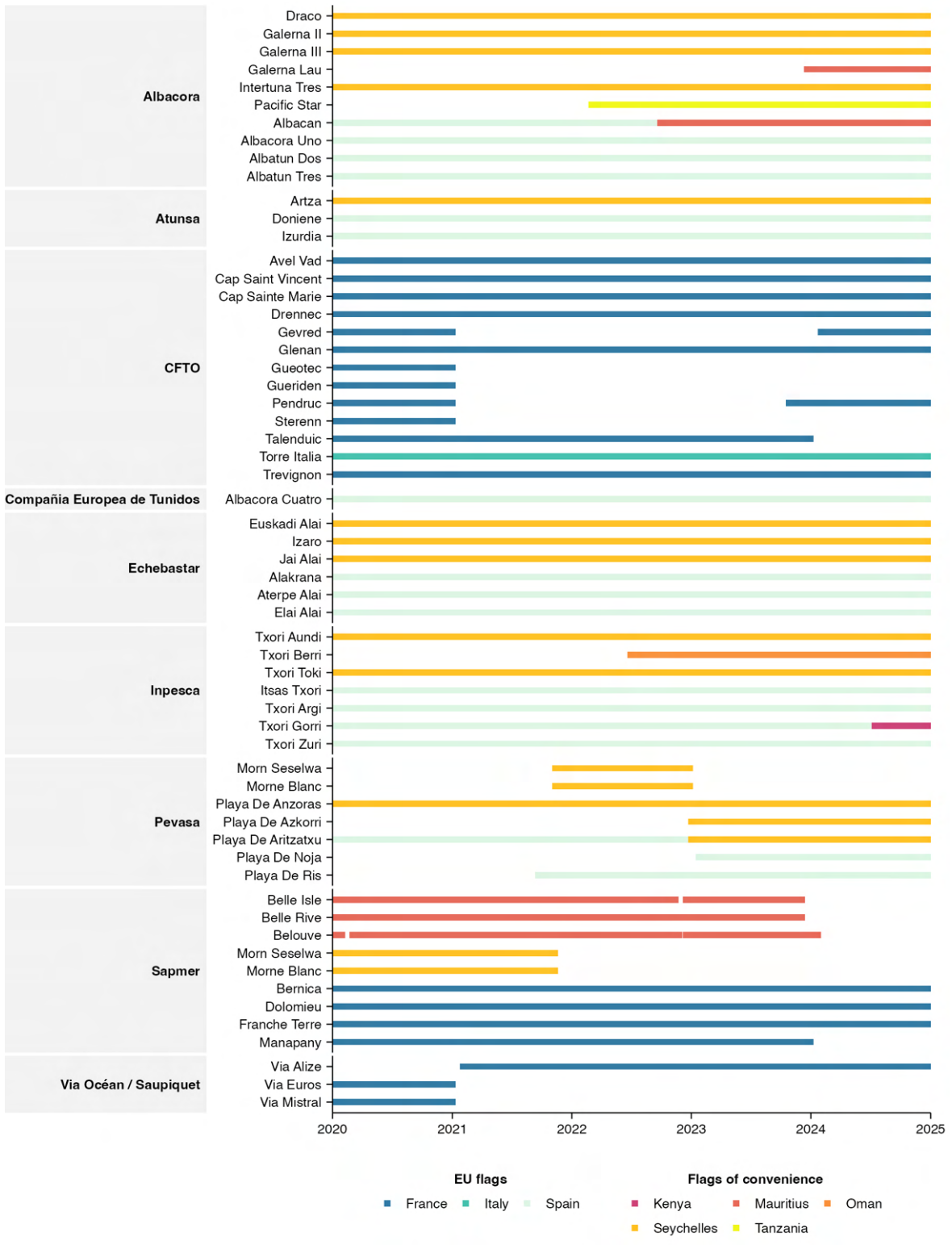
This is particularly striking in the case of the European Commission, which:

- On its ‘legal services’ side, launched an infringement proceedure against France in 2021 for failing to comply with the 10% ‘margin of tolerance’ per species between the declared weight and the verified weight; a ‘margin of tolerance’ that could not be met by the tuna lobby due to its extensive use of FADs (as FADs generate catches consisting mainly of juveniles, for which species cannot be distinguished);
- On its 'trade negotiations' side, which represents the EU within the IOTC, the Commission prevents any restrictions on FADs — and thus compliance with the 'margin of tolerance', among other things — that many coastal States wish to implement. The European Commission even goes so far as to deploy its diplomatic clout to force certain countries to follow it in this suicidal headlong rush, notably Kenya.

As we have seen, France has in parallel chosen to second its key representative to the tuna lobby to undermine negotiations at the European level, rather than forcing its industry to fish differently. The second option is, however, absolutely necessary from a biodiversity perspective, but also desirable from an economic point of view for the industry and entirely feasible to implement. A winning strategy for France and the tuna lobby — in the short term — since the regulation has been watered down and the infringement procedure against France dropped.

It is therefore, in reality, a microcosm of cynical individuals — a handful of lobbyists, European officials, and French and Spanish officials — who collude to continue, as far as possible, their campaign to destroy living organisms. In the process, they are also destroying the trust of European citizens in the institutions, which are supposed to protect the general interest, as well as the trust of citizens in the Indian Ocean, who end up developing deep anti-European resentment and turning towards China or Russia.

ANNEX — EU-OWNED VESSELS AUTHORIZED TO OPERATE IN THE IOTC AREA, 2020–2024



NB: Morn Seselwa and Morne Blanc are the only vessels that have changed ownership over the 2020–2024 period (hence their duplicated names in the graph above). Both were owned by Sapmer (French company) until the end of 2021, at which time Pevasa took ownership (Spanish company). Flags of convenience are in yellow-red shades, while EU flags are in green-blue shades. Note that some of these vessels have operated in the Atlantic Ocean, although they were authorized to operate in the Indian Ocean.

CONTACT

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