

A Review of the Transshipment Practices
within the Inter-American Tropical Tuna
Convention Area

The Pew Charitable Trusts

July 2019

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In 2012, the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Convention (IATTC) adopted Resolution C-12-07 (amended and replaced C-11-09) on establishing a program for transshipment by large scale fishing vessels. Since then, the number of reported high seas transshipments has increased by over 67 percent, a growing trend that is evident within many other tuna regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs). While transshipment plays an important role in the fishing industry, the current regulatory landscape within IATTC has not progressed to ensure proper oversight of this growing practice. Vessels interested in defying regulations established to minimize illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing continue to take advantage of opportunities to avoid proper catch reporting and to launder illegally caught fish via at-sea transshipment operations. Unregulated or poorly monitored transshipment practices can also provide opportunities for other transnational crimes to occur, such as the trafficking of weapons, drugs, and humans.¹

Many of the current requirements outlined in the IATTC transshipment measure stem from wording in the preamble that stipulates there is “...grave concern that organized tuna-laundering operations have been conducted, and a significant amount of catches by IUU tuna longline fishing vessels have been transshipped under the names of duly licensed fishing vessels...”² [Resolution C-12-07](#) bans at-sea transshipments with the exception of those between large-scale tuna longline fishing vessels (LSTLFVs) and authorized carrier vessels. However, as of May 30, 2019, there were a total of 1,257 authorized LSTLFVs listed in the IATTC database that are eligible to transship at sea. The large number of vessels falling under the exception means that, without proper monitoring and enforcement, the risk that illegally caught fish could be transferred without detection will continue to exist.

This brief assesses the current IATTC transshipment measure, highlights areas that undermine its effectiveness, and recommends practical solutions to establish a more comprehensive Resolution. It also includes a brief discussion of potential high seas transshipments detected in the IATTC Convention Area waters through the analysis of AIS data and provides suggestions on how to improve oversight of these activities.

Key issues	Recommendations
1. There are an increasing number of at-sea transshipment events occurring within the IATTC Convention Area	The IATTC should update the current transshipment resolution C-12-07 to ensure that all transshipments occurring within the Convention area are reported to all relevant authorities (flag, coastal, and port State authorities, and the RFMO Secretariat) in near real time
2. There is a demonstrated need for robust and timely sharing of transshipment data between IATTC and WCPFC	Strong information-sharing protocols related to transshipments need to be established between IATTC and WCPFC, including for observer-related data
3. Monitoring of transshipment activities is inadequate and compliance with regulations is insufficient	The IATTC should evaluate how the current transshipment resolution is implemented and address issues such as discrepancies between transshipment quantities reported by the ROP and that reported by the commission
4. Discrepancies exist between carrier vessel activity reported by IATTC and that which was identified through AIS analysis	IATTC should consider using AIS data to supplement existing information in order to gain a better understanding of carrier vessel movements within the Convention area.
5. Recommended changes to the IATTC transshipment Resolution	Key updates to the resolution include requiring a publicly-available list of fishing vessels that are authorized to transship and the inclusion of IMO numbers. Further recommendations are detailed in the last section of the paper

1. There are an increasing number of at-sea transshipment events occurring within the IATTC Convention Area

Between 2009, when the Regional Observer Program (ROP) was first implemented, and 2017, 4,490 at-sea transshipment events that transferred 348,449 metric tons of IATTC-managed fish have been reported by the ROP. In a recent 5-year period, the number of annual at-sea transshipments occurring within the IATTC Convention Area increased by 67 percent - from 371 transfers in 2012 to 622 in 2017. The total annual tonnage of catches transshipped has also increased by over 38 percent from 29,762 metric tons in 2012 to 41,166 metric tons in 2017. The number of trips taken by observers to monitor transshipments has increased as well by over 90 percent between 2012 (26) and 2017 (50). In addition, the number of days observers spent at sea to monitor transshipments has grown from 1,647 days in 2012 to 2,878 in 2017 – a 74 percent increase.³

While transshipments enable the efficient movement of fish to maintain freshness and obtain high market prices, the practice usually involves high value tuna and thus can also create economic incentives for misreporting as another means to increase profits. Bigeye tuna caught by longline vessels are often used for fresh or frozen sashimi and therefore command higher prices per metric ton: in 2014, bigeye tuna had an end value- the total amount paid by the final consumer – of \$5.17 billion USD.⁴ Bigeye, which is currently experiencing overfishing⁵, was also the most transshipped species in 2017; accounting for 41 percent (17,149 metric tons) of all the fish transshipped that year. This is a consistent trend for every year between 2009 and 2017, with the exception of 2016.³

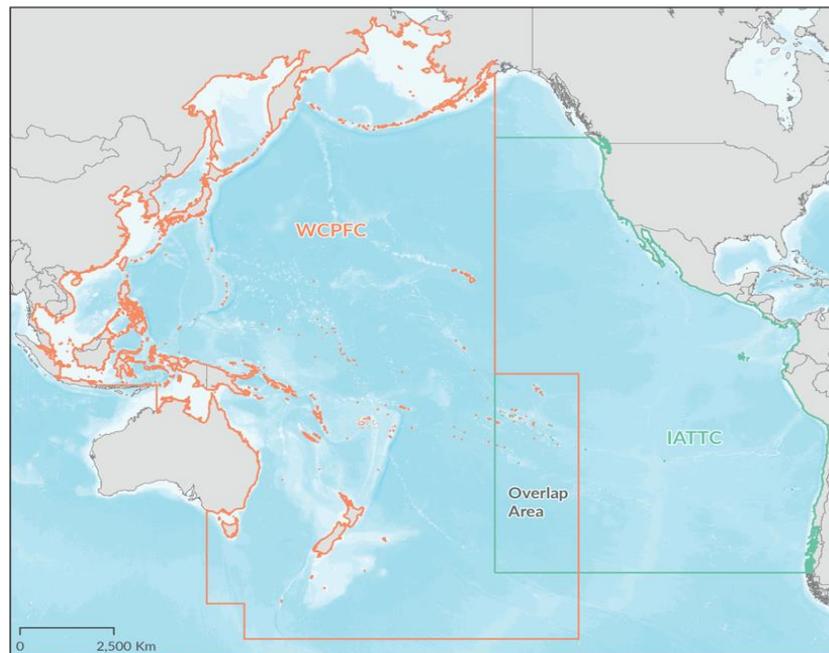
Recognizing the relatively high value of tuna transshipped and the increasing trend of high seas transshipments occurring within its Convention Area, the IATTC should update the current Resolution to increase monitoring and allow authorities to better track and audit data on transshipped catch.

2. There is a demonstrated need for robust and timely sharing of transshipment data between IATTC and WCPFC

Figure 1 shows the overlap in Convention Area waters between IATTC and the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC). In 2017, 11,820 metric tons of bigeye tuna was transshipped in this overlap area.³ The overlapping jurisdictions and separate management measures in place in these dual-managed areas makes it difficult to determine if vessels are complying with all applicable regulations. A 2016 analysis using automatic identification system (AIS) data found a high concentration

of carrier vessel activity in the IATTC/WCPFC overlap area; yet, it is unclear which regional fishery management organization (RFMO) regulations these carrier vessels were operating under while in the overlap area. Currently, WCPFC does not require observer reports to be submitted directly to the WCPFC Secretariat. Due to the overlapping jurisdictions and unclear regulations, transshipments occurring within these overlap areas may not have been well documented or reported to the appropriate RFMO.

Figure 1 - WCPFC and IATTC Convention Areas Overlap Across the Pacific⁶



Source: The Pew Charitable Trusts

Recommendation: The amount of transshipment activity that occurs in the IATTC/WCPFC overlap area is an indication that strong information-sharing protocols need to be established between IATTC and WCPFC, including for observer-related data. This will help ensure that the product sourced and/or transshipped is reported to the relevant RFMO. The IATTC should ensure that all observer reports, especially those for transfers that occur within overlap areas, are sent directly to the IATTC Secretariat and any other relevant RFMO from which the transferred fish was sourced. In addition, IATTC should develop a publicly available list that documents which RFMO's regulations vessels are operating under when operating within the overlap area.

At present, MRAG, the current carrier observer provider for IATTC, does not have an agreement with WCPFC for an embarked IATTC observer to collect and report data on transshipments that occur in the Western Pacific; hence, if a carrier vessel transships west of the 150W line, the IATTC observer onboard is only able to observe transshipments “...at the captain’s discretion...”⁹ This means that the captain has the authority to prevent an IATTC observer from recording/reporting a transshipment event in this area. IATTC observer reports also do not record whether carrier vessels that move from IATTC waters to WCPFC waters to conduct high-seas transshipments have a WCPFC observer onboard to observe these transshipments. As such, these transshipments may go wholly unobserved and unreported.

Recommendation: Carrier observers should be cross-endorsed and allowed to record and report to the appropriate RFMOs all transshipments encountered, regardless of the Convention Area. The current data-sharing agreement between IATTC and WCPFC should be expanded to specifically include the carrier observer service provider such as MRAG. This will improve operational efficiency, eliminate the need for multiple observers onboard one vessel and ensure consistent transshipment reporting across Convention Areas.

3. Monitoring of transshipment activities is inadequate and compliance with regulations is insufficient

a. Carrier Vessels Flagged to Non-CPC Members and authorizations

The IATTC Secretariat indicated that as of June 2018, specific carrier vessels flagged to Sierra Leone were included on the IATTC list of carrier vessels authorized to receive at-sea transshipments³, although Sierra Leone is not a member or cooperating non-member of the Commission (CPC). The ROP does not report any 2017 observer deployments on Sierra Leone-flagged carrier vessels, it is therefore unclear how IATTC would have detected any infraction of the Commission Resolutions. In addition, IATTC only makes publicly available the current authorized carrier vessel list on the IATTC website (Table)⁷ which is accurate only as of the day of publishing and does not include data fields outlining authorization dates. Lack of historical carrier vessel authorization dates also limits transparency and restricts the ability of both CPC authorities and independent organizations to conduct cross-verification and audit checks of carrier vessel activity.

Recommendation: The IATTC has a very limited ability to hold non-CPCs accountable for infractions of Commission Resolutions. To strengthen IATTC’s ability to regulate all transshipments within the Convention Area, IATTC should require that vessels be flagged to a CPC to be authorized to transship. In

addition, IATTC should make historical carrier vessel authorization lists publicly available, including authorization dates, to facilitate the ability for CPC authorities and independent organizations to cross-check and validate the activities of carrier vessels beyond that of the current posted list.

Table 1: List of Carrier Vessels authorized to receive at-sea transshipments from LSTLFVs – May 2019⁸

Flag	China	Korea	Japan	Liberia	Panama	Chinese Taipei	EU	Vanuatu	Total
Number	7	8	4	25	22	4	1	1	72

b. *Carrier Vessels that are not Authorized to Transship with any CPC*

The list of authorized carrier vessels includes a column that details the CPCs that authorize carrier vessels to transship with their LSTLFVs. While some carrier vessels are listed with multiple CPCs authorizing their LSTLFV to transship with the carrier vessel, there are 20 carrier vessels that have no CPC listed. All 20 carriers are flagged to Liberia, a cooperating non-contracting party, which flags the most (35 percent) number of authorized carrier vessels.⁸ Due to the lack of publicly available historical IATTC carrier vessel authorization lists, it is unclear whether any of the authorized Liberian-flagged carrier vessels were missing similar CPC authorizations.

Recommendation: IATTC should limit transshipment operations between LSTLFVs of the flag State CPCs and their specifically authorized carrier vessels. This will enable IATTC to accurately track the transshipment supply chain, reduce the likelihood of misreporting and allow the ROP to clearly attribute observer deployment costs. Carrier vessels which do not have specific flag State CPC authorizations from which LSTLFV fleets they can transship with should not be included in the authorized carrier vessel list and not be utilized by the ROP for observer placements.

c. *Discrepancies in Reports by the ROP and IATTC Secretariat*

The ROP reports that a total of 39 carrier trips were observed in 2017, yet the summary table within the same report only documents the trip details for 31 trips.⁸ The total tonnage transhipped by these 31 trips only equates to 32,803 metric tons, while the IATTC Secretariat report documents 42 trips (40 that ended in 2017) where a total of 41,166 metric tons of fish were transhipped.³ This leaves 11 trips and 8,363 metric tons of transshipment details undocumented in the ROP report.

Recommendation: IATTC should evaluate the CPC and observer reports to detect any inconsistencies. For the sake of transparency IATTC should make individual observer and CPC annual transshipment reports publicly available to allow for third-party cross verification of transshipment related information.

d. *Infractions involving Transshipment Activities*

The Secretariat's implementation report lists five instances where the tonnage reported by the carrier vessels differed from that of the observer. In two instances, the observer recorded unreported tuna catches, and in three instances, the vessel crew interfered with the observer's duties.³ The report does not provide any additional information regarding which vessels, or the flag State(s), the infractions pertain to as well as whether any of the instances were further investigated by the appropriate authorities.

Recommendation: To improve accountability, IATTC should include vessel names and flag states in reports of infractions. Flag CPCs should document measures taken to address infractions within their annual implementation reports. Severe or persistent infractions should be discussed and addressed during the annual IATTC Compliance Committee meeting.

e. *Delayed Reports*

The Secretariat did not receive annual transshipment reports for 2016 from Korea, Panama, and Vanuatu.³ The ROP reports that of the 662 transshipments for the year 2016, 16% (104) were from Vanuatu, and 12% were from Korea (45) and Panama (33); meaning 182 transshipments (28%) were left unverified.⁹ This is a clear defiance of paragraph 19 of Resolution C-12-07 which states that "...[e]ach CPC shall report before 15 September to the Director..." details of the previous year's transshipment activities. These reports are also important to assess responses to observer reports and any infractions encountered.

Recommendation: To enable verification of transshipment related data received by observers, IATTC should require that CPCs submit reports in a timely manner. IATTC should regularly evaluate each CPC's compliance with the current transshipment Resolution and their ability to effectively monitor their own flagged vessels. Clear processes must be put in place to address countries who are non-compliant with annual transshipment reports, a key tool to verifying transshipment events and properly regulating vessels.

f. *Lack of Standardized Data Submission Forms*

For in-port transshipments, Annex 1, paragraph 6 of the Resolution states that “...each flag CPC with LSTLFVs shall report each year to the IATTC, the details of the transshipments by its vessels...” - yet it is unclear what should be included in this report. The at-sea transshipment annual reporting requirements in Paragraph 19 include a short list of information to be provided but a template has not been created. A clear template documenting the critical information required would help improve the standardization and effectiveness of these reporting procedures and aid in compliance reviews.

Recommendation: IATTC should develop a template (similar to that suggested below) for the reporting of information required by paragraph 19 and Annex 1 of Resolution C-12-07.

Flag state: XXX				
Submission Date: 9/10/2021				
A. Transshipments Events by Species and Location for Calendar Year 2020				
Species	Received or offloaded	Quantities transshipped in Port (t)	Quantities transshipped within EEZs	Quantities transshipped at the High seas
YFT	Offloaded	5,123	0	4,321
B. List of Vessels that Transshipped Within the Calendar Year 2020				
Vessel Name and IMO number	Received or offloaded	Number of transshipments	Total quantities transshipped (t)	Number of transshipment declarations submitted to IATTC
XXXX/ xxx	Received	184	11,325	184

4. Discrepancies exist between carrier vessel activity reported by IATTC and that which was identified through AIS analysis

Large carrier vessels such as those used in transshipments are mandated by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) to carry and use AIS transponders (this IMO requirement does not extend to smaller fishing vessels). Based on [analysis of AIS data by Global Fishing Watch and The Pew Charitable Trusts](#) all 42 carrier trips reported by the IATTC Secretariat for the calendar year 2017 were observed on AIS. However, preliminary analysis of AIS data could only fully corroborate the trip details (including the dates, trip lengths and ports visits) for 26 of the 42 carrier trips reported by the Secretariat.³ AIS analysis showed different data (trip dates, length and port visits) for the remaining 16 reported carrier trips where, in some cases, the differences proved significant.

In addition, AIS data identified five carrier trips conducted by four carrier vessels that were not included in either transshipment reports published by the IATTC or the ROP. These four carrier vessels movements via AIS were consistent with transshipment at-sea. It is unclear if these carrier vessels and/or trips were authorized or reported to IATTC. The absence of these four carrier vessels and their five trips from the ROP report may indicate that an IATTC observer was not onboard, and any potential transshipments were not independently observed and documented.

Recommendation: AIS can play a role in verifying transshipments and carrier trips that occur within the IATTC Convention area. IATTC should consider using AIS data to supplement existing information in order to gain a better understanding of carrier vessel movements within the Convention area.

5. Recommended changes to the IATTC transshipment Resolution

- LSTLFVs receive an exception to the general prohibition of at-sea transshipments, yet the Resolution does not include a definition for LSTFLVs and there are some inconsistencies between at-sea and in-port transshipment requirements. *Any future amendments to the Resolution should specifically define LSTLFVs and ensure consistent reporting practices for both the at-sea and in-port transshipments for all vessels.*
- Paragraph 5 of the Resolution states that CPC's "...shall determine whether or not to authorize their LSTLFVs to transship at sea... ". The Resolution requires the creation of a list of vessels authorized to transship; however, any longline vessel that can fish in the Convention Area is assumed to also be authorized to transship. *Maintaining current and historical publicly-available lists of both carrier and fishing vessels specifically authorized to transship, along with the authorization periods, would allow*

flag States the option of allowing vessels to fish, but not transship, and provide greater transparency of those vessels specifically authorized to transship.

- IATTC does not explicitly require observers to inspect the authorizations permitting at-sea transshipments. *Requiring a regularly updated publicly-available list of fishing vessels authorized to transship would enable observers to more easily confirm whether an LSTLFV is authorized to transship.*
- The Resolution's notification obligations enable LSTLFVs to delay transmission of the IATTC transshipment declaration to its flag state by up to 15 days. Considering that the transshipment declaration form only requires basic information observed during the transshipment event, it is unclear why there is an extended period for submission. *Declarations should be required to be transmitted to all relevant authorities (flag, coastal, and port State authorities, and the RFMO Secretariat) within 24 hours of completing the transshipment. This will limit any opportunity to alter recorded information and allow for prompt verification of data. In addition, upon entry into the IATTC Convention Area, carriers should be required to notify IATTC of their intent to transship and confirm the presence of an observer and an operational vessel monitoring system (VMS) on board.*
- Paragraph 20 states that *"...all tuna and tuna-like species and sharks landed in, or imported into, the territory or area of a CPC, either unprocessed or after having been processed on board and which are transshipped, shall be accompanied by the IATTC transshipment declaration until the first sale has taken place..."* This language allows for transshipping and/or importing IATTC-caught species in the port of a non-CPC country without documentation. *This language should be revised to require that transshipped products sourced from IATTC waters but landed outside the Convention Area in ports of non-contracting parties, be accompanied by transshipment declarations until the first point of sale.*
- The current IATTC transshipment declaration form does not include a field for IMO numbers, which is inconsistent with international standards and could hamper cross-referencing between the record of fishing vessels and the authorized list of carrier vessels. Additionally, these forms only require observer signature if transshipment occurred at sea. *To meet international standards and improve reporting consistency, IATTC should revise the transshipment declaration to require the inclusion of IMO numbers for all eligible vessels and data fields clearly outlining transshipment geocoordinates. If present, observers should also be required to observe and validate in-port transshipments.*
- The IATTC Secretariat's report and the ROP report documents tuna species transshipped but does not include shark species specific quantities transshipped. This is despite paragraph 19 of the Resolution that requires each CPC to report annually *"...[t]he quantities by species transshipped*

during the previous year...” Shark species data is needed for accurate estimates of species-specific catches and stock assessments. Taking heed of the Scientific Advisory Committee advice¹⁰, a column should be added to the declaration form to record species of transshipped sharks. Identification guides are available for most of the sharks caught within the Convention Area.

- The Resolution is ambiguous about its applicability to the transshipments of IATTC-managed resources that occur outside the Convention Area. *Clarifying language must be included to require that any transshipment of IATTC- managed species sourced from IATTC waters must take place between vessels included in the authorized list of vessels, regardless of whether the transshipment takes place outside or inside the Convention Area.*

Conclusion

At-sea transshipments have long been regarded as a possible avenue to introduce IUU-caught fish into the seafood supply chain. Enhanced controls are urgently needed to improve the transparency of transshipment practices and to ensure proper reporting and monitoring. The onus is on RFMOs, like IATTC, to improve transshipment regulations and harmonize information sharing agreement between Convention Areas. IATTC must strengthen the existing transshipment Resolution to obtain and reconcile complete reports on transshipment data that can be used to support effective fisheries management and quality science.

¹ U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime, “Transnational Organized Crime in the Fishing Industry” (2011), http://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/Issue_Paper_-_TOC_in_the_Fishing_Industry.pdf; Environmental Justice Foundation, “Pirates and Slaves, How Overfishing in Thailand Fuels Human Trafficking and the Plundering of Our Oceans” (2015), https://ejfoundation.org/resources/downloads/EJF_Pirates_and_Slaves_2015_0.pdf; Sallie Yea and Transient Workers Count Too, “Diluted Justice: Protection and Redress for Trafficked Fishermen in Asia” (2016), <http://twc2.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Diluted-Justice-Oct-2016-FINAL-VERSION.pdf>.

² Resolution C-12-07 Amendment to Resolution C-11-09 on Establishing a Program for Transshipments by Large-Scale Fishing Vessels. https://www.iattc.org/PDFFiles/Resolutions/IATTC/_English/C-12-07-Active_Amendments%20and%20replaces%20C-11-09%20Transshipments.pdf

³ Implementation of the IATTC Regional Observer Program for Transshipments at Sea. Document CAF-06-03 CORR. https://www.iattc.org/Meetings/Meetings2018/IATTC-93/PDFs/Docs/English/CAF-06-03-CORR-11-Jul-18_Program-to-monitor-transshipments-at-sea.pdf

⁴ Netting Billions: A Global Valuation of Tuna. <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/2016/05/netting-billions-a-global-valuation-of-tuna>

⁵ Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission, “Stock Status Indicators for Bigeye Tuna” (2018), https://www.iattc.org/Meetings/Meetings2018/SAC-09/PDFs/Docs/English/SAC-09-16-EN_Stock-Status-Indicators-for-bigeye-tuna.pdf.

⁶ WCPFC and IATTC, via United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) <http://www.fao.org/geonetwork/srv/en/main.home>; NPFC https://www.npfc.int/about_npfc/convention_and_npfc_area_of_application/npfc-shape-file; and Land and Bathymetry from Natural Earth <https://www.naturalearthdata.com/about/terms-of-use/>

⁷ List of Authorized Carrier Vessels – May 2019 <https://www.iattc.org/PDFFiles/VesselDatabase/VesselList/English/List-of-authorized-carrier-vessels.pdf>

⁸ Review of the IATTC Regional Observer Programme Covering the period January 1, 2017 to February 15, 2018. Document CAF-06-03 ADD. 1 https://www.iattc.org/Meetings/Meetings2018/IATTC-93/PDFs/Docs/English/CAF-06-03-02_ADDENDUM%201%20MRAG%20Americas%C2%A0Program%20to%20monitor%20transshipments%20at%20sea.pdf

⁹ IATTC Review of the IATTC Regional Observer Programme – May 11, 2017 – MRAG Americas Inc. https://www.iattc.org/Meetings/Meetings2017/IATTC-92/PDFs/OtherDocuments/English/IATTC-92-OTR_MRAG-report-on-at-sea-transshipment-program-2016.pdf

¹⁰ Staff Recommendations for Management and Data Collection, 2019. SAC 10-19

<https://www.iattc.org/Meetings/Meetings2019/SAC-10/10th-Meeting-Scientific-Advisory-CommitteeENG.htm>