

Mauritius and the Indian Ocean: Advancing Sustainable Fisheries through IORA Cooperation

Author : Dr (Mrs) Bhavna Mahadew

Law Lecturer, University of Technology, Mauritius & IORAG ECPN Steering Committee

Member: Internal Stakeholders

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The Indian Ocean has long been a source of livelihood, food security, and economic opportunity for millions of people living along its coasts. Among the countries deeply connected to its marine resources is Mauritius, an island nation whose history, culture, and economic development are closely tied to the ocean. In this context, the work of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) in promoting sustainable fisheries management is of particular significance. As a member of IORA, Mauritius has both an opportunity and a responsibility to contribute actively to regional efforts aimed at preserving marine resources while supporting economic growth.

Fisheries are not merely an economic sector in Mauritius; they form a crucial component of national food security and employment. The country's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) is vast—covering more than two million square kilometres when including the joint management area with Seychelles—making Mauritius one of the major ocean states in the region. The fishing sector supports thousands of livelihoods directly and indirectly, including artisanal fishers, seafood processors, exporters, and workers in related maritime industries. At the same time, Mauritius has positioned itself as a regional hub for seafood processing and trade through its seafood hub strategy.

However, the sustainability of these marine resources cannot be taken for granted. Like many countries in the Indian Ocean region, Mauritius faces growing challenges from overfishing, illegal fishing activities, and the effects of climate change. Rising sea temperatures, coral reef degradation, and changing fish migration patterns threaten the long-term viability of fisheries. For small island developing states such as Mauritius, these environmental changes have immediate consequences because they directly affect food security, coastal livelihoods, and the broader blue economy.

In this context, the role of the Indian Ocean Rim Association becomes critical. As a regional organisation bringing together countries bordering the Indian Ocean, IORA provides a platform for cooperation, dialogue, and collective action. The organisation recognises that sustainable fisheries management cannot be achieved by individual countries acting alone. Fish stocks move across national jurisdictions, and illegal fishing networks often operate across borders. Consequently,

regional collaboration is essential to ensure that marine resources are effectively protected and responsibly managed. Mauritius stands to benefit significantly from the initiatives undertaken by IORA, particularly through the Core Group on Fisheries Management (CGFM) and the Fisheries Support Unit (FSU). These mechanisms are designed to enhance cooperation among member states, promote knowledge sharing, and strengthen the capacity of countries to manage fisheries sustainably. For Mauritius, participation in these initiatives offers access to regional expertise, scientific research, and policy coordination that can reinforce national fisheries governance.

One of the most pressing concerns addressed by IORA is the fight against Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing. IUU fishing poses a serious threat to marine ecosystems and undermines the economic benefits that coastal states should derive from their marine resources. For Mauritius, which manages an extensive maritime area, monitoring and enforcement remain significant challenges. Through regional cooperation facilitated by IORA, countries can share surveillance information, coordinate enforcement strategies, and strengthen legal frameworks to combat illegal fishing more effectively. Another important area where Mauritius can contribute is the promotion of science-based fisheries management. The Jakarta Concord highlights the importance of strengthening scientific research and supporting the work of Regional Fisheries Management Organisations. Mauritius already hosts the Secretariat of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission, placing the country at the centre of regional fisheries governance. By leveraging its institutional capacity and expertise, Mauritius can contribute to developing policies that ensure the sustainability of tuna stocks and other commercially valuable species.

IORA's emphasis on supporting small-scale fishers is also highly relevant for Mauritius. Many coastal communities rely on artisanal fishing as their primary source of income. Yet these fishers often face challenges such as limited access to financing, inadequate storage facilities, and difficulties accessing international markets. Regional initiatives focusing on seafood handling, processing, and storage can strengthen value chains and help Mauritian fishers increase the profitability and sustainability of their activities. Capacity building and technical cooperation also play an important role. Regional initiatives coordinated under IORA allow member states to exchange knowledge, share best practices, and strengthen technical expertise in areas such as aquaculture development, marine conservation, and fisheries monitoring. For Mauritius, such collaboration complements national efforts to develop a sustainable blue economy and adopt environmentally responsible fishing practices. Fisheries also contribute significantly to trade and economic diversification. Mauritius has developed a well-established seafood processing industry that exports value-added fish products to markets in Europe, Asia, and beyond. By promoting seafood safety, quality standards, and efficient post-harvest technologies, IORA initiatives can help

ensure that Mauritian seafood products remain competitive in global markets while encouraging sustainable fishing practices.

Ultimately, sustainable fisheries management is not only an environmental concern but also a matter of economic resilience and social well-being. For Mauritius and other Indian Ocean countries, the ocean represents both a shared resource and a shared responsibility. Regional cooperation through IORA offers a practical pathway toward balancing economic development with environmental conservation. By actively engaging with IORA's fisheries initiatives, Mauritius can further strengthen its role as a responsible ocean state. Through collaboration, scientific innovation, and a commitment to sustainability, Mauritius and its regional partners can ensure that the rich fisheries resources of the Indian Ocean continue to support livelihoods, food security, and economic development for generations to come.