



BELIZE HIGH SEAS FISHING VESSEL CIRCULAR



FVC-13/09

Issued: 8th April 2013

Rev: 1

TO: ALL SHIPOWNERS, OPERATORS, CHARTERERS, MASTER AND CREW, DEPUTY REGISTRARS AND RESIDENT AGENTS

SUBJECT: FISH AGGREGATING DEVICES (FADs)

Reference: Issued in accordance with Part II 3 (1)(f) and Part VII 19(1)(2) of the Belize High Seas Fishing Act, 2003

BACKGROUND:

The term FAD stands for “fish aggregating device”, and generally refers to artificial structures that are deployed in the ocean to attract schools of fish. FADs function as open-ocean “meeting points” with multiple species gathering underneath them. It is generally believed that fish use these floating objects or protection, increased food availability and to increase survival of eggs, larvae and juvenile states of development.

Overall information on FAD use is not widely available because information on their exact numbers and locations is considered proprietary by industrial fishing vessel operators and fleets. However, their widespread use has already had numerous adverse impacts such as: overfishing, decreased weight of tunas caught near FADs, increase over time in fish biomass, reduced free school abundance, differences in fish size and ages compared to free school caught tuna, alterations in school movement patterns, high volumes of by-catch and an increased difficulty of properly assessing the status of individual tuna populations.

APPLICABILITY

This Circular is applicable to all Belize registered fishing vessels operating on the high seas engaged in the utilization of FADs.

TYPES OF FISH AGGREGATING DEVICES:

For the purpose of this circular, a FAD is “any artificial structure that is deployed in the ocean to attract schools of fish”.

This Circular differentiates between different types of FADs for the intention of regulating their use. The following types of FADs are covered under this Circular:

- a. Anchored FAD – an object or group of objects, or any size, that has or has not been deployed, including but not limited to buoys, floats, netting, webbing, plastics, bamboo, and logs floating on or near the surface of the water that fish may associate with and that has a mooring line attached to an anchor or other object that ensures the FAD remains in a fixed location.
- b. Deployed Drifting FAD – any object or group of objects, of any size, that has been deployed, including but not limited to buoys, floats, netting, webbing, plastic, bamboo and logs floating on or near the surface of the water that fish may associate with.
- c. Other FAD – any other object or group of objects that fits the over-riding definition of a FD but is not an anchored FAD or a deployed drifting FAD.

APPLICATION TO VESSEL TYPES AND FISHERY AREAS

This Circular is applicable to all Belize flagged purse seine fishing vessels operating on the high seas and other jurisdictions.

This section describes the provisions that will be applied to Belize flagged purse seine vessel operating on the high seas.

The requirements below will be endorsed via conditions of fishing licenses issued to relevant vessels.

- a. **FAD CLOSURE** - All Belize flagged purse seine vessel operating on the high seas and any other jurisdictions utilizing FADs will be required to observe Area/Time Closures in relation with the protection of juveniles as contained in any relevant conservation and management measures of the area where they operate.
- b. **CATCH RETENTION** - In order to discourage fishing practices that result in a high level of small fish by-catch, all bigeye, skipjack, and yellowfin tuna taken by a fishing vessel shall be retained on board and then landed or transhipped.
- c. **FAD LIMITS** - Each Belize flagged purse seine fishing vessel **will deploy a total of 100 deployed drifting FADs**. Belize flagged purse seine fishing vessel **will not deploy anchored FADs on the high seas** and will be subject to the regulations of other States when fishing in their jurisdiction.
- d. **FAD MARKINGS** - Deployed drifting FADs must be clearly marked as follows:
 - i. with the name of the vessel that has deployed it,
 - ii. the date of deployment; and
 - iii. the FAD number

The information shall be contained on a removable plate that in the event that FADs are changed, the plate can be connected to the new FAD.

The data above must be in lettering of at least 30cm high and of a colour that contrast with the colour of the plate. The plate must be connected to a point on the FAD where it is clearly noticeable.

The FAD number is to be allocated by the vessel master and shall be the first three letter of the vessel name followed by a two digit number (which shall be sequential according to the number of FADs deployed in the high seas), followed by the letter “HS” to indicate deployment in the high seas.

- e. **FAD DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION** – All deployed man-made FADs must meet the following minimum criteria:
- i. The FAD must have a portion that remains above the water line at all time (the raft section). The raft section must be painted with reflective paint and large enough to be clearly detectable from a distance of 1 kilometer (km).
 - ii. The radar reflector must be attached to the raft section at least 2 meters above the water line to guarantee that it is noticeable from a practical distance.
 - iii. FAD resources must be attached to the raft section (or each other) in a way that, as far as possible, prevents part of the FAD from becoming separated from each other.
- f. **REQUIREMENT FOR DEPLOYING FADs** - The deployment of FADs during FAD closure periods is strictly prohibited. At any other times, deployment must be directed in accordance to the below requirements.

Beginning 1st January 2013, all Belize flagged purse seine vessels operating in the ICCAT area will be subject to 100% observer coverage under the ICCAT Regional Observer Programs in accordance with relevant regulations. Observers should monitor FAD deployments of all surface fishing vessels 20 meters LOA or greater fishing bigeye and/or yellowfin tunas in any area/time closure

The vessel master must provide the following information in writing to the Flag State when deploying a drifting FAD:

- i. **The date of deployment;**
- ii. **The location (latitude and longitude) recorded in degrees and minutes;**
- iii. **The FAD number that has been assigned; and**
- iv. **A declaration that the FAD meets the marking and design requirements contained above.**

No FAD shall be deployed unless prior authorization from the Flag State is granted and which shall be reliant on:

- Provision of all information contained in (f) above; and
- The number of FADs already deployed by the vessel

This Administration shall not agree to the deployment of a FAD if records show that the FAD limit would be surpassed by the relevant vessel.

- g. **REQUIREMENTS FOR RETRIEVAL OF FADS** – As of 1st January 2013, 100% observer coverage is required for vessels operating in the ICCAT area under the regional observer program. Observers will be required to monitor FAD retrieval

The vessels master must supply the following data in writing to this Administration:

- The date of retrieval;
- The location (latitude and longitude) recorded in degrees and minutes of retrieval; and
- The FAD number

ADMINISTRATION

- I. **FAD REGISTER** - The Flag State will keep a record of deployed FADs to ensure the management of the number of deployed FADs. This information shall be kept confidential and shall be used when reviewing requests to deploy FADs or for research and reporting purposes. The information may also be used as part of any investigation into suspected breach of the provisions of this Circular and any other fishery management measures.

- II. **REPLACING LOST FADs** – the vessel master shall notify this Administration that a FAD has been permanently lost by providing the following information :
 - The date of last sighting of the FAD;
 - The location (latitude and longitude) recorded in degrees and minutes of last sighting;
 - The FAD number; and
 - FAD construction material

The Administration will review this information and may grant approval to deploy a replacement FAD depending on the situations.

- III. **FAD OWNERSHIP** – This Circular does not generate any property rights over FADs or fish that may aggregate to them. No exceptionality of access is considered when a particular vessel deploys a FAD in accordance with this Circular.

ENFORCEMENT AND COMPLIANCE

This Circular is considered a legally binding document in accordance with Part XIII 108(1)(2) of the Merchant Ships Registration Act 2010. Failure to comply with this circular will result in disciplinary actions taken against the vessel owners and operators and any other party affiliated with the operation of the vessel.

IMPLEMENTATION

This Fishing Vessel Circular replaces Notice is to be implemented with immediate effect and shall remain in force until further notification by the Belize Administration

Any queries related to this Circular should be directed to:

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