



POSITION PAPER

2018

21ST SPECIAL MEETING OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE CONSERVATION OF ATLANTIC TUNAS (ICCAT)

DUBROVNIK, CROATIA, 12-19 NOVEMBER 2018

On the occasion of the 21st Special meeting of the Commission, WWF encourages all Contracting Parties and Cooperating non-contracting Parties (CPCs) to continue their efforts and actions improving the state of the stocks and maintaining progress towards long-term sustainability and ecosystem-based management.

WWF applauds the adoption last year of [\[Rec. 17-04\]](#) on a Harvest Control Rule for North Atlantic Albacore. This first successful result set an important milestone for ICCAT and paves the way to implement a comprehensive harvest strategy to manage all stocks under the Convention in the long term. WWF recognizes the additional efforts needed to develop and test Harvest Strategies through Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) for priority stocks in the Convention. The Commission should therefore facilitate this process ensuring that any additional resources needed for a prompt adoption of MSE-tested management procedures are made available.

Monitoring, Control and Surveillance

Effective monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) are crucial to ensure compliance with management measures and to fight IUU fishing and illegal trade of live fish. In particular major improvements are needed in terms of observer coverage, especially for tropical tunas and trans-shipment. WWF urges the Commission to focus its efforts on:

- developing electronic reporting standards for receiving vessels amending [\[Rec 16-15\]](#) in order to require the notification of trans-shipment at least 48 hours in advance and make mandatory the declarations by fishing vessels to ICCAT and the flag state in real time, and in any case no more than 7 days after the trans-shipment event
- amending [\[Rec. 14-09\]](#) concerning minimum standards for the establishment of a Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) in the Convention area in order to make data available and transparent to the Secretariat, the SCRS and the Compliance Committee. SCRS noted the current frequency of transmissions at 4-hour intervals to be insufficient for most fishing gears; the frequency of transmissions should therefore be extended to 1 hour
- full implementation of [\[Rec. 13-13\]](#) to ensure that all eligible vessels in the Convention area are equipped with an IMO number.

Compliance

A strong compliance assessment process is key to ensure the enforcement of management measures. The ICCAT [\[Resolution 16-17\]](#) established a schedule of action to improve compliance and cooperation within the Convention, setting the bar higher for other tuna RFMOs in terms of compliance. WWF urges CPCs to make a further effort in this direction and codify the Resolution into a binding Recommendation for CPCs.

Trans-shipments in high seas

Trans-shipment remains one of the most prominent weaknesses in catch documentation and verification that leads to IUU fishing in the Convention area. WWF notes that the most simple, efficient, and effective solution to the challenges of trans-shipment-related IUU is to simply prohibit all at-sea trans-shipment and require all fishing vessels to land their catch at the nearest available designated port following the conclusion of fishing activities. However, acknowledging that a prohibition on trans-shipment is politically unlikely at this stage, WWF supports an unequivocal 100% observer monitoring requirement for all trans-shipments in the Convention area, subject to strong sanctions for non-compliance. Trans-shipment requirements should also be buttressed by verification and validation of trans-shipment activities through redundant systems in addition to a Vessel Monitoring System (VMS). WWF also recommends that ICCAT endorses further observer safety and security measures, including fully transparent documentation and a catalogue of observer incidents and people involved.

Atlantic Bluefin Tuna

This year the Scientific Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS) confirmed the advice to adopt a management plan for the **East Atlantic and Mediterranean stock** of Bluefin Tuna, amending the current [Rec. 17-07] for a recovery plan. Although scientific uncertainties concerning the stock assessment still persist, last year CPCs agreed on a stepwise increase of the Total Allowable Catch up to 36,000 tons in 2020 which is the highest catch limit ever set in ICCAT for this stock.

Recent [news](#) reported ongoing criminal investigations by the Spanish police and Interpol related to unreported Bluefin Tuna catches estimated to be in the order of 2,500 tons per year (nearly 10% of the TAC for 2018). ***The magnitude of this case and such serious allegations involving farming, trading companies and landing ports in EU Member States, provide a strong rationale for caution in any decision related to the management of the East Atlantic and Mediterranean stock of Bluefin Tuna.*** Remaining loopholes related to the control of live fish trade and fattening, and the large impact on small pelagic species used as feeding for farmed tuna, suggest that tuna farming capacity should be limited, ensuring no increase from the 2017 baseline.

Considering the potential level of IUU fishing that is still taking place, WWF urges CPCs to reconsider any quota increase or weakening of the provisions currently in place for the management of the stock. On the other hand stronger measures are needed to monitor the live trade of bluefin tuna, focusing in particular on:

- banning carry-over of post-harvest in bluefin tuna farms from one year to the following year
- increasing controls for towing vessels in case of VMS signal failure to ensure a real time track
- addressing any existing loopholes in the eBCD to avoid illegal bluefin entering the market
- ICCAT Compliance Committee should properly analyse any suspected individual illegal activities and should also adopt corrective measures (such as “pay back” and the inclusion of boats in ICCAT IUU vessels black list) when CPCs are suspected of overshooting quotas

Developing harvest strategies for Atlantic Bluefin Tuna and testing them through Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) is an ongoing process in ICCAT.

While recognizing the importance of agreeing on a management procedure in 2020, WWF urges the Commission to dedicate the necessary resources to ensuring the success of this process according to the tight schedule.

Compliance and impacts on the ecosystem and by-catch must be taken into account when allocating fishing opportunities. Priority access to the resource should be given to small-scale fisheries, including a clear definition and criteria, without affecting the efficient ad hoc monitoring and control system of small-scale fleets.

Last year the Commission agreed on total allowable catches (TAC) of 2,350 t in 2018, 2019 and 2020 for the **West Atlantic stock** of Bluefin Tuna. The SCRS advice indicates that these catches would be unlikely to lead to overfishing for this 3-year period. However it is to be noted that scientists warned in 2017 that catches exceeding 1,000 t would result in an estimated decrease in biomass between 2018 and 2020.

WWF asks CPCs to maintain the current management framework for the West Atlantic stock in line with the SCRS advice, while fast-tracking the process to adopt MSE-tested management procedures.

Mediterranean Swordfish

After 30 years of overfishing, a 15-year recovery plan for Mediterranean Swordfish was adopted in 2016 with [Rec. 16-05]. Total Allowable Catches for 2017 were set at 10,500 t, with a 3% reduction for the following 5 years. While recognizing the efforts that CPCs have made to improve the status of this highly depleted stock, WWF is concerned about the current level of catches of this species in the region. The most recent data on landings presented by the SCRS, report 8,400 t in 2017 which is 20% less than TAC for the same year. Anecdotal evidence also confirms this negative trend for catches in 2018.

WWF is particularly concerned about this trend and notes that the current recovery plan sets catch limits that do not take into account the real level of catches.

WWF therefore asks the Commission to urge SCRS to organize a data preparatory meeting and a new stock assessment in 2019 to provide scientific advice and new management recommendations that take into due account the level of catches of Mediterranean Swordfish.

Concerns persist about illegal driftnets which are still used to target Swordfish and other species in several Mediterranean countries. WWF encourages ICCAT to push an investigation and characterization of the problem to tackle such illegal operations.

Tropical tunas

WWF is highly concerned about the slow progress in effective tropical tuna fisheries management in the Convention area, particularly regarding the decreasing Atlantic Bigeye Tuna population. According to the 2018 SCRS stock assessment there is a 99.5% probability that the Bigeye Tuna stock is both overfished and experiencing overfishing while it is only at 59% of the level capable of producing maximum sustainable yield (MSY) with a fishing mortality 163% higher than the rate at MSY.

In 2015, ICCAT adopted a recovery plan for Bigeye Tuna with a TAC of 65,000 t and only a 49% chance of recovering the stock by 2028 [Rec. 15-01]. However the 2016 catch was 23% (79,958 t) above the TAC and 21% higher again in 2017 (78,482 t). At current catch levels, the probability that the stock will collapse by 2033 is approximately 60%.

SCRS have determined that one of the key measures of Atlantic Bigeye Tuna – the FAD time-area closure – has failed to reduce the mortality of juvenile Bigeye and Yellowfin Tuna, concluding that a new closure is also not likely to be successful, unless the overall FAD fishing effort is reduced. Major specific gaps remains also in longline and other gears and the lack of basic ICCAT mechanisms to ensure that CPCs respect TACs and quota is evident and therefore the impossibility of establishing corrective measures.

Regarding Yellowfin Tuna, the TAC of 110,000 t has been overshoot for many years, reaching around 150,000 t in 2016 (36 % above TAC) and the stock may be suffering overfishing.

WWF encourages CPCs to adopt a comprehensive management and Monitoring, Control and Surveillance scheme which includes ad hoc measures for all gears and Flag States targeting tropical tuna. In particularly, WWF recommends to:

- reduce Bigeye Tuna TAC to 50,000 t which gives the stock a 70% probability of full recovery in 2028 (timeframe agreed in 2015 by ICCAT) with a 50% probability of ending overfishing in 2020
- urgently adopt management measures to reduce catches of Bigeye and Yellowfin Tuna juveniles both with purse seiners and pole and line fisheries and improve longline fisheries reporting and performance. This will require an improvement of the current MCS scheme for large and small-scale fisheries which should have also a positive impact on Skipjack Tuna stocks
- substantially reduce the maximum number of activated FAD buoys; with the current 500 per vessel, ICCAT has the highest number of FADs allowed among tuna RFMOs
- establish the safeguards and mechanisms to ensure that CPCs comply with TACs, reporting and management measures for all fisheries. Among other measures, capacity limits per fleet should be immediately adopted and the Secretariat should be provided with tools and resources to monitor tropical tuna catches throughout the year to help prevent any TAC overshoot; like IATTC, the Secretariat's real time monitoring of catches during the season, would allow ICCAT to take the necessary conservation decisions to avoid overfishing
- agree on an allocation scheme for Yellowfin Tuna as well as for Bigeye Tuna for those CPCs with lower catches

- implement national mechanisms to ensure that total catches of Bigeye and Yellowfin Tuna remain within the allocated TAC
- ensure real progress – providing necessary funding and human resources to SCRS – within Harvest Strategy processes for tropical tunas, allowing ICCAT to adopt comprehensive management following the planned schedule; adopt interim Harvest Control Rules as soon as possible while Harvest Management Evaluation process is completed
- improve MCS measures in all fisheries, including a requirement of 100% observer coverage for large purse seines and a minimum of 20% coverage for large longliners year round, with 100% coverage as a mid-term target either human, electronic or in combination
- align [\[Rec. 12-07\]](#) with the FAO Agreement on Port State Measures to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing
- improve data collection and monitoring of all fleets, providing best available data and allocating appropriate funding and resources to improve the quality of future stock assessments
- address major gaps in FAD data reporting by key CPCs, ensure compliance with the requirement of [\[Rec. 16-01\]](#) to use non-entangling FADs, and support research regarding biodegradable FADs while promoting global best practices to reduce FAD-related juvenile mortality and bycatch, regardless of the gear used
- require all FAD-related data included in paragraph 23 of [\[Rec. 16-01\]](#) to adopt 1x1 squares to facilitate analysis
- implement science-based management and monitoring recommendations developed by ICCAT’s FAD Working Group and joint RFMOs’ FAD Working Group adopting FAD management objectives with a schedule of activities
- improve biological and ecological knowledge of Bigeye, Yellowfin and Skipjack Tunas and the impact of different type of gears on stocks and ecosystems.

Sharks

WWF is concerned about the status of pelagic sharks in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean and supports an expansion of the Convention’s scope for enhanced elasmobranch conservation and comprehensive management of existing target shark fisheries in the convention area.

WWF recognizes the efforts that CPCs have made in recent years to ban and/or limit the retention of certain vulnerable species and improve the compliance review of conservation and management measures regarding sharks caught in association with ICCAT fisheries. However, to limit fishing mortality and improve chances of survival after release of sharks, WWF urges that science-based conservation and management measures must be adopted and implemented. Additional management measures to further reduce mortalities should include, but not be limited to time/area closures, gear restrictions and safe handling and best practices for release of live specimens.

WWF sees a strong need for CPCs to strengthen their monitoring and data collection efforts to monitor the future status of shark stocks. Discard rates of many species including CITES-listed species is largely unknown.

WWF urges CPCs to make efforts towards:

- the implementation of precautionary measures for all highly vulnerable shark species and/or in cases of high uncertainty
- improved measures and strengthened efforts to mitigate bycatch and maximize post-release survival of vulnerable species in both purse seine and longline fisheries
- SCRS to conduct spatial effort analysis and provide a scientific advice and new management recommendation in 2019 that take in due account new observer data on discards of vulnerable shark species. This will be crucial to pave the way for sound recovery plans for depleted shark species in the Convention area
- improvement of data collection of all shark species caught and released

While recognizing that the recommendation [Rec 17-08] was adopted last year and will be revised in 2019, based on the SCRS recommendation,

WWF asks for a 0t annual catch (complete prohibition of retention) to immediately stop overfishing and increase the chances of rebuilding the stock of North Atlantic Shortfin Mako Shark by 2040. The maximum catch level for the South Atlantic Shortfin Mako Shark stock should be set in line with SCRS advice.

In addition WWF asks the Commission to adopt an overdue fins naturally attached policy for sharks following the remarkable steps forward already made by NAFO (2017), GFCM (2018) and partially IOTC (2018) in that direction. Several CPCs have done this since 2013.

WWF is concerned that catches for **Blue Sharks in the North Atlantic** in 2016 (44,067t) and 2017 (39,675t) were higher than reference catch limits (39,102t) established with [Rec. 16-12]. WWF therefore invites the Commission to consider further precautionary measures for the North Atlantic stock, including:

- setting a TAC in 2018 for North Atlantic stock in line with SCRS advice
- mandating SCRS to develop additional advice for the definition of a sound, long-term management plan for both Atlantic Blue Shark stocks including – but not limited to – the establishment of interim Harvest Control Rules, the potential adoption of a minimum size, spatial-time measures, and by-catch avoidance strategies
- Given the uncertainty of the status of the **South Atlantic Blue Shark stock**, a precautionary approach should urgently be adopted based on the recommendation of the SCRS, establishing a TAC to avoid increase in catches in the future.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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Why we are here

To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.