



POSITION PAPER

2017

25TH REGULAR MEETING OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE CONSERVATION OF ATLANTIC TUNAS (ICCAT)

MARRAKECH, MOROCCO, 14-22 NOVEMBER 2017

Major steps have been taken in the last decade for the sustainable management of the East Atlantic and Mediterranean stock of bluefin tuna (*Thunnus thynnus*) and effective measures have been put in place towards the sustainable management and associated compliance performance of Atlantic tunas and tuna-like fisheries. WWF encourages ICCAT to finalize the adoption of important amendments to the Convention that will enable the Commission to manage all shark fisheries and adopt a precautionary approach and ecosystem-based management for its future decisions.

Progress has been made over the last two years towards more efficient management of stocks with harvest strategies, adopting Recommendations 15-04¹ and 15-07² in 2015, and the Draft Road Map³ and Recommendation 16-06⁴ in 2016.

WWF encourages all CPCs to adopt an interim harvest control rule (HCR) this year for northern albacore (*Thunnus alalunga*) in line with scientific advice and to secure an inter-sessional meeting in early 2018 to define management objectives and harvest strategies for Atlantic bluefin tuna. We also urge CPCs to continue their efforts and act according to the spirit of the Convention, improving the state of the stocks and maintaining progress towards long-term sustainable management.

Atlantic bluefin tuna

The outcomes of the 2017 stock assessment for Atlantic bluefin tuna confirmed that the measures adopted for the recovery of both the east and west stocks are generating positive results with the bluefin tuna no longer subject to overfishing. However, scientists warned that the assessment was still not clear and that a number of uncertainties prevent the Standing Committee for Research and Statistics (SCRS) from declaring the east Atlantic and Mediterranean stock recovered.

Taking into account the uncertain recruitment for both stocks, the SCRS was not able to provide indications on BMSY. Scientists chose to consider projections using $F_{0.1}$ as a proxy for F_{MSY} . This resulted in a less precautionary approach, especially for the west stock for which 2018 yields according to $F_{0.1}$ will nearly double those based on F_{MSY} .

WWF's vision for Atlantic bluefin tuna is of a precautionary, science-based and holistic management that recognizes the increasing interconnections between the western and the eastern stocks and the reciprocal benefits of healthy stocks.

From an environmental perspective, WWF is concerned about the potential increase in tuna ranching in the Mediterranean if the additional quota for the east Atlantic and Mediterranean stock is allowed in the near future. The increased production of farmed bluefin could generate heavy impacts on small pelagic stocks that are massively used for feeding and are frequently overfished in our oceans.

WWF recommends that all actors support the sustainable consumption of bluefin tuna and call on CPCs to discourage the increase of live bluefin tuna caught for ranching purposes, which should not exceed the current uptake (2017) in order to freeze the farming capacity and ensure that forage fish is sustainably sourced.

Taking into account the management recommendations that the SCRS has provided to the Commission and the need to adopt a precautionary approach to complex systems, **WWF recommends that CPCs ensure that:**

- TAC for the east Atlantic and Mediterranean stock is increased to no more than 28,000t by 2020. As indicated by the SCRS, with catches of up to 28,000t there is a higher than 50% probability of a continuing increase in the stock (Fig 1). The SCRS has advised that increasing the quota to 36,000t by 2020 would have a greater than 60% probability of maintaining F below $F_{0.1}$ in 2020 or 2022. However, scientists also warned that the Kobe matrix is not able to integrate important sources of uncertainty that remained unquantified after the last stock assessment.
- The allocation of the additional quota in no way jeopardizes monitoring and control, resulting in an increase in non-compliance or Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing. The highest standards of control must be ensured; 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, without prejudice to the current monitoring and control system and adopting an electronic system to track operations.
- The western stock of Atlantic bluefin tuna is allowed to increase in biomass by reducing TAC to 1,000t by 2020. Scientists warned that catches exceeding 1,000t would result in an estimated decrease in biomass between 2018 and 2020. The decreases in biomass are predicted due to the below average recruitment in recent years and the fact that the 2003 year-class has passed its peak biomass. The SCRS recommendation to increase catches up to 2,500t, would lead to almost 9% decline in biomass by 2020 (Fig. 2).

- Data quality is improved to reduce uncertainties in stock assessments. Particular efforts should be made to ensure regular fisheries independent data collection, and prompt catch reports from national observers in longline fisheries.

Mediterranean Swordfish

After 30 years of overfishing, the first Recovery Plan⁵ for Mediterranean swordfish (*Xiphias gladius*) was adopted in 2016. Although this is a first positive step to improve the state of the stock, measures need to be adjusted to reach the SCRS recommendation of a substantial reduction of fishing mortality in order to start rebuilding.

While recognizing the efforts that CPCs have made towards the recovery of this stock, **WWF recommends that further efforts should be made to:**

- Ensure the prompt and full implementation of ICCAT Recommendation 16-05 establishing a multi-annual recovery plan for Mediterranean swordfish.
- Introduce a further reduction of TAC, from 3 to at least 5% each year over the period 2018-2022.
- Ensure that the seasonal closure of the swordfish fishery overlaps with that targeting Mediterranean albacore (October-November) to reduce the fishing mortality of undersized fish.
- Improve data collection of the fisheries targeting swordfish and Mediterranean albacore regarding the discard of juveniles.
- Establish a Catch Documentation Scheme (CDS) for Mediterranean swordfish to combat IUU fishing and ensure traceability of the catches.
- Evaluate the state of the stock with a full assessment no later than 2019.

Sharks

Many shark species in the ICCAT Convention area remain subject to high levels of fishing mortality that current stock assessment trends suggest could be unsustainable. WWF is concerned by shark conservation and sustainability in the Convention area as a whole and considers it important to take into account responsible management, trade and consumption where shark mortality occurs as a result of all fishing activities, not just in circumstances where tuna is fished.

WWF is particularly concerned about the recent stock assessment for the North Atlantic shortfin mako shark (*Isurus oxyrinchus*), which indicates an alarming decline in the population.

WWF recommends that ICCAT:

- Prohibits all catches, trans-shipments and landings of Atlantic shortfin mako shark within the Convention area.
- Immediately introduces effective science-based catch limits for all stocks of blue shark (*Prionace glauca*), including the development of reference points and management plans to proactively prevent overfishing and stock depletion.
- Adopts a policy for all species of shark of landing the whole fish with fins attached, to ensure the practice of finning does not occur in the Convention area.
- Ensures that the implementation requirements for CITES-listed sharks are undertaken by CITES parties and non-parties trading with CITES parties where they are required to make non-detriment and legal findings for the issue of export permits for trade in these species*.
- Ensures the improvement of data collection and reporting of all shark by-catch, including full reporting for all trans-shipments.

Tropical tunas

While recognizing the Commission's efforts to improve the long-term sustainability of tropical tuna fisheries in recent years, major challenges remain and reported catches in 2016 of bigeye (*Thunnus obesus*) and yellowfin (*Thunnus albacares*) tuna were respectively 11% and 16% higher than TAC. Considering 2016 bigeye tuna catches, the stock has only an estimated 38% probability of a successful recovery by 2028; SCRS warns that juvenile catches remain high, including FAD-related mortality.

To ensure science-based management of tropical tuna fisheries in the Atlantic, CPCs need to agree on important next steps to improve data reporting and compliance with rules and catch limits for all gears. Few CPCs have apparently established effective mechanisms to monitor quota consumption and ensure their fleets' catches remain within the allocated TAC.

In the case of bigeye tuna fisheries and considering the lack of any allocation scheme for yellowfin tuna, efforts to keep stocks at sustainable levels have been heavily undermined. While 11 CPCs with purse seine fleets account for around half of the total catches, by October 2017 only 3 of these 11 have provided required FAD-related information.

*Where ICCAT contracting Parties make non-detriment findings for shark species, they should share with ICCAT details of those findings so that the ICCAT Secretariat can provide information to the CITES Standing Committee working group on sharks.

These gaps demonstrate the need for full commitment by all parties — including fishing fleets — to ensure Harvest Strategies are urgently adopted for all tropical tuna stocks.

WWF recommends that ICCAT:

- Establishes stock-specific management measures for all types of gears in line with scientific advice to ensure the full recovery of bigeye tuna with at least 80% possibility of success by 2028 and maintains yellowfin and skipjack tuna stocks within sustainable levels.
- Provides the Secretariat with tools and resources to monitor tuna catches throughout the year to help prevent any TAC overshoot as in other RFMOs, and that CPCs implement national mechanisms to ensure that total catches of bigeye tuna remain within the allocated TAC [Rec. 16-01].
- Agrees on an allocation scheme to ensure total catches of yellowfin tuna do not exceed 110,000t [Rec. 16-01].
- Improves Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (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.
- Amends Recommendation 14-09 regarding the use of the Vessel Monitoring System to align with leading global standards, improving transmission frequency and making data available to the ICCAT Secretariat; aligns Recommendation 12-07 with the FAO Agreement on Port State Measures to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing.
- Improves 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 and ensure real progress within Harvest Strategy processes for tropical tunas, to ensure ICCAT adopts comprehensive management following the planned schedule⁶.
- Addresses major gaps in FAD data reporting by key CPCs, ensures compliance with the requirement of Recommendation 16-01 to use non-entangling FADs, and supports research regarding biodegradable FADs while promoting global best practices to reduce FAD-related juvenile mortality and bycatch, regardless of the gear used.
- Clarifies definitions and reporting instructions of FAD-related data, adopting 1°x1° squares to facilitate SCRS data analysis.
- Implements 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.
- Improves biological and ecological knowledge of bigeye, yellowfin and skipjack tunas and the impact of different types of gears on stocks and ecosystems.

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 ICCAT Convention area. WWF notes that the most simple, efficient, and effective solution to the challenges of transshipment-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 activity.

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 all ICCAT Commission waters, subject to strong sanctions for non-compliance and that trans-shipment requirements 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 endorse further observer safety and security measures, including fully transparent documentation and a catalogue of observer incidents and people involved.

¹ Recommendation by ICCAT to Establish Harvest Control Rules for the North Atlantic Albacore Stock, <http://iccat.int/Documents%5CRecs%5Ccompendiopdf-e%5C2015-04-e.pdf>

² Recommendations by ICCAT on the Development of Harvest Control Rules and of Management Strategy Evaluation, <https://www.iccat.int/Documents/Recs/compendiopdf-e/2015-07-e.pdf>

^{3,6} Draft Road Map for the Development of Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) and Harvest Control Rules (HCR), Proposal submitted by the United States and the European Union, https://www.iccat.int/com2016/DocENG/PLE_137B_ENG.pdf

⁴ Recommendation by ICCAT on a Multi-annual Conservation and Management Programme for North Atlantic Albacore, <http://iccat.int/Documents/Recs/compendiopdf-e/2016-06-e.pdf>

⁵ Recommendation by ICCAT establishing a Multi-annual Recovery Plan for Mediterranean Swordfish, <https://www.iccat.int/Documents/Recs/compendiopdf-e/2016-05-e.pdf>

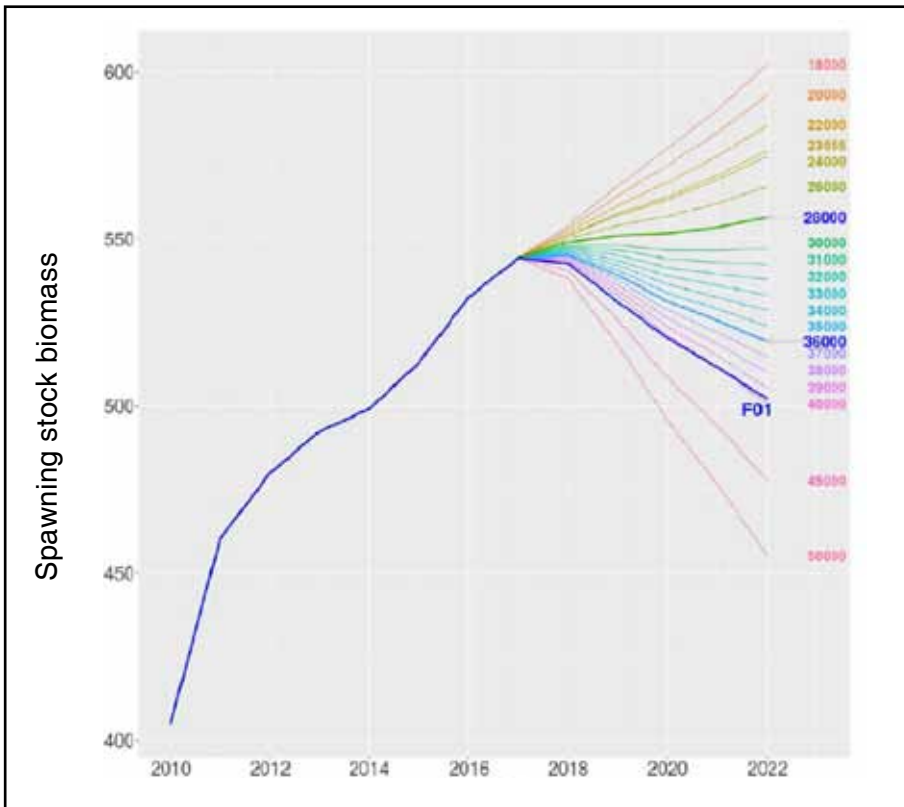


Fig 1. Projections of spawning stock biomass (in 1000 metric tonnes) for eastern stocks of Atlantic bluefin tuna up to 2022

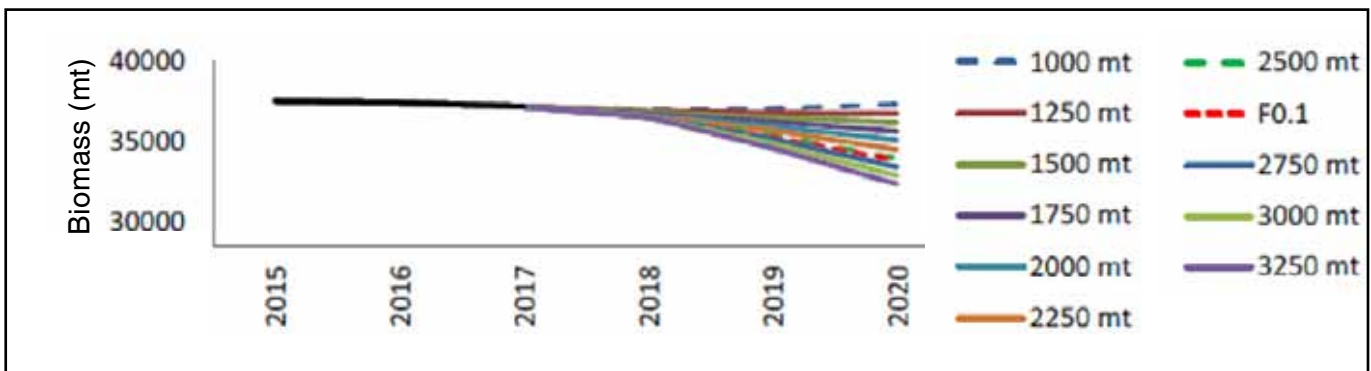


Fig. 2 Projections of total stock biomass for for western stocks of Atlantic bluefin tuna up to 2020

Source: 2017 SCRS Annual Report.

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.