

## INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE CONSERVATION OF ATLANTIC TUNAS (ICCAT) VIRTUAL MEETING, NOVEMBER 14-21, 2022

The impacts of COVID-19 continue to present challenges to RFMOs. Even under these challenging circumstances, ICCAT must ensure the uninterrupted, sustainable management of the tuna stocks and marine ecosystems under its purview. This Statement focuses on those critical measures and issues on which ICCAT must take action in 2022, which align with the ISSF global priorities for tuna RFMOs.

### Tuna Conservation

#### What are the issues?

Effective management measures are needed to ensure bigeye and yellowfin tuna catches are maintained at sustainable levels.

#### Why are we concerned?

The eastern and western Atlantic skipjack stocks were reassessed in 2022 and resulted in a similar picture of stock status to the previous (2014) assessment, reiterating that the stocks are in a healthy condition. In 2021 the estimated catches of tropical tunas decreased. Bigeye catches continue to be below the TAC and yellowfin catches are slightly higher than the TAC. Nevertheless, catches of both bigeye and yellowfin have substantially exceeded the TACs for years and CPCs with overcatches could not always be identified because there were no full allocations. The TACs need to be completely allocated so that CPC-specific non-compliances can be identified. In addition, ISSF continues to be concerned with overcapacity in the ICCAT region, even though some purse seine vessels left the Atlantic Ocean during the last year. Fishing fleet overcapacity increases pressure to weaken management measures, and eventually it leads to stock overexploitation.

#### What is ISSF asking ICCAT to do?

- (1) Revise Rec. 21-01 to ensure that the bigeye and yellowfin stocks are maintained at sustainable levels and their catches are maintained within the TACs by:
  - (i) Adopting a bigeye TAC in line with SCRS advice to allow for the stock to shift to the green quadrant of the Kobe plot with high probability. A TAC of 70,000 tonnes or less would achieve this objective.
  - (ii) Adopting a precautionary yellowfin TAC that is aligned with SCRS advice. A TAC of 120,000 tonnes or less would achieve this.
  - (iii) Maintaining the current 72 day Atlantic-wide FAD closure and adopting additional measures to better monitor and manage FADs.

#### Our Top Asks for ICCAT:

- 1** Ensure that catch limits in the Recommendation that supersedes Rec. 21-01 allow the bigeye and yellowfin tuna stocks to remain at sustainable levels and catches are maintained within the TACs.
- 2** Review compliance with FAD data reporting provisions and take corrective measures as needed. Adopt in 2022 a timeframe to transition to FADs without nets and made primarily with biodegradable materials; develop recovery policies, a marking scheme and ownership rules; and require FAD position and acoustic data for scientific use.
- 3** Adopt harvest strategies for bluefin tuna in 2022 and in 2023 accelerate the development of harvest strategies for all tropical tuna stocks.
- 4** Adopt minimum standards for electronic monitoring by 2023. Require 100% observer coverage (human and/or electronic) for all major ICCAT fisheries, and all vessels engaged in at-sea transshipment by 2024.
- 5** Request the Compliance Committee to address non-compliance with FAD data reporting requirements and develop audit points for ICCAT measures.

- (iv) Agreeing on management objectives for managing the fishing mortality of juvenile vs. adult yellowfin and bigeye tunas.
  - (v) Developing and adopting procedures to identify and sanction non-compliance with TAC allocations.
- (2) Fully allocate the TACs by fishing gear and/or CPC.

## Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs)

### What are the issues?

In the Atlantic, FAD sets account for nearly 53% of tropical tuna catches, including 78% of skipjack catches. Comprehensive data on FAD deployments and usage are required to effectively manage the tropical tuna purse seine fishery. The Commission has requested the SCRS to advise on several matters related to FADs (e.g., limits on FAD sets or FAD deployments), but the SCRS has been unable to respond because historical and current data submissions from CPCs are incomplete. In addition, currently deployed FADs should be lower-entangling and fleets should be moving towards fully non-entangling using primarily biodegradable materials to mitigate ecosystem impacts and reducing marine debris.

### Why are we concerned?

Submission of required FAD data continues to be incomplete, thus hindering regional analyses by SCRS. This problem has been ongoing since 2014. In 2021 these submissions were finally reviewed by the Compliance Committee and this process must continue, including possible sanctions. ICCAT requires non-entangling FADs, but this measure and its compliance needs to be reinforced.

### What is ISSF asking ICCAT to do?

- (1) Revise Rec. 21-01 to:
  - (i) Specify in Annex 5 that non-entangling FADs should not use any netting;
  - (ii) Require fleets to remove entangling FADs found in the water;
  - (iii) Design and adopt FAD-recovery mechanisms and incentives by 2023, including alerting relevant coastal States;
  - (iv) Require vessels to provide complete near-real time (with a maximum time lag of 90 days) FAD position data and acoustic records from echosounder buoys for scientific use;
  - (v) Set a clear timeframe to transition to FADs made primarily with biodegradable materials and, in the interim, encourage further large-scale biodegradable FAD sea trials and for fleets to deploy a percentage of FADs made of biodegradable materials; and
  - (vi) Require observer coverage on supply and tender vessels.
- (2) Develop and adopt a FAD marking scheme by 2023 for all new FAD deployments, regardless of vessel type, that requires that FADs be marked on both the buoy and the FAD structure.
- (3) Mandate that the Compliance Committee continue to address non-compliance with FAD data reporting requirements, and recommend corrective measures, including those in paragraph 31 of Rec. 21-01.
- (4) Develop and adopt by 2023 FAD ownership rules and definitions; and
- (5) Develop clearer rules for activation and deactivation of FAD buoys.

## Harvest Strategies

### What are the issues?

Harvest Strategies — which include target and limit reference points together with harvest control rules — provide pre-agreed rules for managing fisheries resources and acting on stock status changes. The urgent adoption of harvest strategies is necessary to achieve precautionary management of Atlantic tuna stocks.

### Why are we concerned?

ICCAT has been developing harvest strategies and testing them through MSE so to adopt them for priority stocks within a planned timeframe. However, accelerated action is needed for tropical tunas. The current MSC-established deadlines for harvest strategy (HS) and HCR (Principle 1) conditions, if not met, could result in certifications being suspended.

## What is ISSF asking ICCAT to do?

In 2022, adopt a harvest strategy for western and eastern Atlantic bluefin tuna. In 2023, accelerate the development of harvest strategies for all tropical tuna stocks.

## Bycatch and Sharks

### What are the issues?

ICCAT needs to improve measures and strengthen bycatch-mitigation efforts and maximize these vulnerable species' post-release survival in both purse seine and longline fisheries. In addition, science-based conservation and management measures to limit fishing mortality on sharks must be adopted and implemented. Data collection and reporting is essential. Landing sharks with fins naturally attached aids in data collection, species identification and monitoring and enforcement. Both WCPFC (see CMM 2019-04) and IOTC (see Res. 17/05) have shark conservation measures that include provisions for fins naturally attached, with some exceptions (e.g., in the IOTC it applies to only sharks landed fresh) or alternatives. Shortfin mako sharks are fished for food, their fins and sport, with no international catch limitations in place for the South Atlantic stock.

### Why are we concerned?

In ICCAT, a proposal for fins-naturally attached gains more co-sponsors each year it is tabled; however, some CPCs continue to oppose such a measure. In the North Atlantic, the SCRS has noted it could take ~25 years to rebuild the shortfin mako shark stock even if fishing mortality rates were cut to zero. In 2021, ICCAT adopted a prohibition on retention of north Atlantic shortfin makos for 2022 and 2023 (Rec. 21-09) and asked the SCRS to calculate a possible shortfin mako retention allowance. SCRS has calculated this to be 0 tonnes in 2023.

### What is ISSF asking ICCAT to do?

- (1) Extend the retention ban for shortfin mako in the North Atlantic and adopt a complementary prohibition for the South Atlantic stock.
- (2) Support work by the SCRS and CPCs to identify shark mortality mitigation measures through gear changes.
- (3) Require all sharks be landed with fins naturally attached without exceptions.

## Monitoring, Control and Surveillance

### OBSERVER COVERAGE AND ELECTRONIC MONITORING

#### What are the issues?

Comprehensive observer coverage on vessels is critical to sustainable fisheries management for tropical tunas. The COVID-19 Pandemic affected observer coverage in the purse seine and longline fisheries in most oceans. The situation would have been different if there were minimum standards for Electronic Monitoring (EM) in place. At its 2022 meeting, SCRS adopted minimum standards for the collection of scientific data in longline fisheries through EM.

#### Why are we concerned?

ICCAT currently requires 10% observer coverage for longline fisheries targeting tropical tunas. In the past, the SCRS has highlighted that in order to provide reasonable estimates of total bycatch it recommends increasing coverage to 20%. The paucity of data from longline fisheries hinders the development of effective conservation measures. In 2021, ICCAT established an Electronic Monitoring Systems Working Group that has made positive progress and should consider incorporating the minimum standards adopted by SCRS.

#### What is ISSF asking ICCAT to do?

- (1) Develop and adopt by 2023 minimum standards for an EMS program and a timeline for implementation of a comprehensive EM and electronic reporting program, including for logbooks, with emphasis on longline vessels.
- (2) Develop an ICCAT regional Observer Program (per Rec. 21-01).

(3) Require 100% observer coverage (human and/or electronic) for all industrial ICCAT fisheries, and all vessels engaged in at-sea transshipment, by 2024.

## PORT STATE MEASURES

### **What are the issues?**

Port State Measures are also an essential tool for combatting IUU fishing and ensuring fish or fish products from such activities do not enter the market.

### **Why are we concerned?**

ICCAT's [Recommendation 18-09](#) on an ICCAT Scheme for Minimum Standards for Inspections in Port, must be strengthened and aligned with [best-practice standards](#) and the FAO Agreement on Port State Measures.

### **What is ISSF asking ICCAT to do?**

Adopt further amendments to modernize Rec. 18-09 and bring it in line with global best practices, such as by: (i) outlining minimum standards for inspector functions; (ii) outlining minimum standards for inspection reports; and (iii) Requiring all inspection reports to be transmitted to flag State of the vessel and relevant States and parties, such as other RFMOs and FAO.

## Compliance

### **What are the issues?**

ICCAT has one of the best designed and most transparent compliance assessment processes of the five tuna RFMOs, but it can be strengthened. A strong compliance process improves fisheries management.

### **Why are we concerned?**

ICCAT has enhanced its compliance assessment process, but procedural and policy improvements are still needed. Mandatory data reporting on FADs needs more revision.

### **What is ISSF asking ICCAT to do?**

Adopt a workplan for the Compliance Committee to develop audit points for ICCAT measures, such as those developed for sharks in [Rec. 18-06](#), and adopt the severity of actions table. Continue to review FAD data reporting and take corrective measures as needed.

## Capacity Management

### **What are the issues?**

Experts agree that there is overcapacity in the global tuna fleets.

### **Why are we concerned?**

ISSF continues to be concerned with the global growth of fishing capacity in ICCAT. Fishing fleet overcapacity increases pressure to weaken management measures, and eventually it leads to stock overexploitation.

### **What is ISSF asking ICCAT to do?**

Establish limited entry through closed vessel registries, and develop a common currency to measure fishing capacity, such as cubic meters of well volume.

# ISSF Global Priorities for Tuna RFMOs

Implementation of rigorous management procedures, including harvest control rules and reference points

Effective management of fleet capacity, including developing mechanisms that support developing coastal state engagement in the fishery

Science-based FAD management & fully non-entangling without netting and biodegradable FAD designs

Increased member compliance with all measures adopted, and greater transparency of processes reviewing member compliance with measures

Strengthened Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS) measures and increased observer coverage, including through modern technologies such as electronic monitoring and e-reporting

Adoption of best-practice bycatch mitigation and shark conservation and management measures, including requiring all sharks be landed with fins naturally attached

## Did You Know?

ISSF is leading research on biodegradable FADs in collaboration with fleets operating in the Atlantic Ocean, coastal nations, and other stakeholders.

ISSF develops resources for the vessel community, including skippers guidebooks on bycatch-mitigation techniques and as well as reports on electronic monitoring and vessel monitoring systems.

ISSF also offers guidelines for implementing non-entangling and biodegradable FADs.

Five ISSF conservation measures focus on shark and bycatch mitigation.

Two ISSF conservation measures focus on FAD management.



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