IPNLF Position Statement

3rd Intersessional Meeting of Panel 1

20-22 June 2023, Madrid, Spain

The need for a third intersessional meeting of ICCAT's Panel 1 this year highlights the challenges this Panel is facing in reaching a consensus on a new tropical tuna measure, particularly bigeye tuna. We hope this extra time will be effective in creating a constructive space for the Commission to discuss and prepare a proposal to be finalised at the Annual Session later this year.

TROPICAL TUNA

What are the primary issues at ICCAT Panel 1?

Catches of tropical tuna species, bigeye (BET) and yellowfin (YFT), have exceeded their oceanwide Total Allowable Catch (TAC) allocations multiple times in recent years. Whilst BET is no longer subject to overfishing, and is showing signs of recovery, it remains overfished and should be given time to recover before it faces increased fishing pressure. The status of the YFT stock, however, remains less clear, because, since the last stock assessment in 2019, the TAC of 110,000 tonnes has been consistently exceeded, by as much as 35% in some years. This situation is expected to further degrade the health of this important stock.

What are IPNLF asking ICCAT to do?

- Adopt **precautionary TAC limits** for Atlantic bigeye and yellowfin tuna stocks in line with the SCRS advice, which provides a **high likelihood of stock recovery** within the next 2 generations (15 years for BET, 14 years for YFT) and **meets the needs of small-scale fishing fleets.**
- Implement **stronger monitoring, conservation and management measures to prevent catches beyond the TAC**, with suitable consequences for overcatch.
- Prepare and implement **Harvest Control Rules (HCR) for both the bigeye and yellowfin stocks based on the latest scientific advice**, and encourage the Commission to adopt HCRs for other tropical tunas as established in Rec. 15-07.

Why is this important?

When a TAC is exceeded, the effectiveness of scientifically informed management measures are undermined. Catches beyond scientifically informed catch limits put the stock, and ocean ecosystems, under greater pressure by reducing its productivity and, therefore, its ability to recover from overfishing. This ultimately puts the future of the fishery, and the livelihoods it supports, in jeopardy, with strong socio-economic impacts, particularly on the cohesion of many coastal communities.

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EQUITABLE ALLOCATION OF TROPICAL TUNA

What are the primary issues at ICCAT?

Current allocation mechanisms do not include developing States in an equitable way and IPNLF are concerned by ongoing suggestions that the bigeye TAC should be increased in order to meet the more equitable allocation needs of developing coastal States.

What are IPNLF asking ICCAT to do?

- Adopt an **equitable approach to distributing precautionary TACs for each species**, which critically supports the rights, needs and aspirations of developing coastal States through achieving a more equitable allocation of fishing opportunities, irrespective of the overarching TAC limit.
- IPNLF supports the **"small harvesters" proposal, co-developed and submitted by South Africa, Japan and Brazil (PA1_25)**. We also suggest that redistribution of quota should be done in percentages for all states to ensure longevity of equity regardless of changing annual TAC.
- Consider developing, with the rest of the Commission, an **updated allocation criteria from Resolution 15/13** in which socio-economic dependance, coastal state livelihoods and gear selectivity are primary factors.

Why is this important?

Tuna stocks are internationally shared natural resources, upon which millions of people financially and socially depend on around the world. As a result, despite their shared importance for large multinational fishing companies, the equity of allocated fishing opportunities should be at the heart of allocation discussions. **IPNLF believes that equitable allocation to meet the rights and needs of all nations, especially developing coastal states representing impoverished communities and small-scale fisheries, should not be conditional upon increased catches being imposed upon an already overfished stock**. Equity should be proactively, inherently and unavoidably incorporated within all RFMO allocation mechanisms.

EFFECTIVE FAD MANAGEMENT

What are the primary issues at ICCAT?

In the Atlantic, both the bigeye and yellowfin tuna stocks face immense pressure due to excessive juvenile harvests which are driven most by industrial purse seine fleets' use of drifting fish aggregating devices (dFADs). These devices have a number of ecological impacts including changes to tuna migrations and, in parallel to direct tuna stock impacts, the current use and regular abandonment of

entangling dFAD designs that are not fully composed of biodegradable materials causes ghost fishing, habitat damage and marine pollution. Many believe that current dFAD use contravenes marine pollution law and frequently represents illegal unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing when dFADs enter national waters and marine protected areas without permissions or transparent monitoring.

What are IPNLF asking ICCAT to do?

- **Maintain or extend the oceanwide 72-day FAD Closure**, which is an important component of the suite of measures supporting BET stock recovery. There is no scientific evidence to suggest shortening or reducing the scope of the current FAD Closure would provide any stock benefits, so **IPNLF believe it should be maintained as a recovery enabling precautionary measure**.
- **Make all dFAD data transparent and available within a public dFAD Registry that would enable scientific analysis, monitoring and compliance monitoring.**
- **Implement an independent dFAD Monitoring System** that will track drifting FAD movements on ocean currents, enable compliance monitoring, determine the ultimate fate of all deployed dFADs and inform efforts to recover dFADs before they illegally fish in waters where they are not permitted or damage sensitive coastal ecosystems.
- **Further investigate and react to multiple warnings from scientists that high proportions of juvenile BET and YFT in dFAD catches reduce the potential sustainable Maximum Sustainable Yields (MSY) for these stocks as a larger spawning stock biomass is required to compensate for juvenile harvests**.
- Mandate that all dFADs deployed **must be non-entangling** (prohibiting netting or other meshed materials), and constructed from **biodegradable** materials, and require vessels to **retrieve those that do not meet these requirements.**

Why is this important?

The SCRS have clearly and regularly emphasised the need to protect both the bigeye and yellowfin tuna stocks from excessive juvenile harvests, which are mostly driven by dFAD use. During the most recent intersessional meeting of Panel 1, the SCRS Chair provided an excellent explanation as to how reducing juvenile catches can increase the potential sustainable MSY which reduces the risks and need for iprecaution within fisheries management decision making. This emphasised that effective FAD management measures are critical in enabling the Commission to meet its sustainability objectives.

Ambitious steps have been taken in other ocean areas to implement effective FAD management and improve the transparency of purse seine fisheries use of dFAD fisheries, so we urge ICCAT to also incorporate additional improvements such as those endorsed at the recent IOTC Special Session. Measures to improve transparency and data availability are particularly important at ICCAT where requests for “more science” are delaying action to ensure dFAD use can be sustainable in future.