



CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE CONSERVATION OF ATLANTIC TUNAS (ICCAT) TO THE REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS SECRETARY GENERAL ON OCEANS AND THE LAW OF THE SEA

This report is a brief summary of the main recent developments of the Commission in relation to the relevant provisions of General Assembly resolution 75/239.

Marked by the pandemic that has suddenly invaded, the year 2020 has dramatically altered the usual course of the work schedule. Therefore, the Commission adjusted to this event by quickly adopting measures that allowed it to pursue its agenda.

The Commission convened through correspondence to evaluate the results of the 2020 work plan together with the current status of application of the regulatory measures in force and to establish the conservation and management measures for the future. In 2020, full scientific stock assessments were carried out for four species: **bluefin tuna** (*Thunnus thynnus*) and **Atlantic albacore** (*Thunnus alalunga*), **Mediterranean swordfish** (*Xiphias gladius*) and **porbeagle shark** (*Lamna nasus*). In total, nine new Recommendations and one Reference document were adopted covering relevant issues on Atlantic tuna and tuna-like species conservation and fisheries management.

A wave of cooperation allowed for the roll-over of the multi-annual conservation and management programme for tropical tunas, which implies a TAC for bigeye tuna of 61,500 t for 2021. The annual TAC for yellowfin will remain at the current level of 110,000 t. In addition, in order to reduce the fishing mortality of juvenile bigeye and yellowfin tuna, the three months prohibition on the use of FADs in 2021 was maintained, as was the reduction on the maximum number of fish aggregating devices (FADs) deployed by vessels, as agreed in 2019. Finally, it was decided that intersessional meetings of Panel 1 will be held in 2021 to review existing measures and, *inter alia*, develop catch limits and associated catch verification mechanisms for 2022.

An amendment was agreed to the Recommendation by ICCAT for an Interim Conservation and Management Plan for Western Atlantic Bluefin Tuna (Rec. 17-06), which expired at the end of 2020. The annual total allowable catch (TAC), inclusive of dead discards, of 2,350 t was kept for 2021. In 2021, a new stock assessment for the western Atlantic bluefin tuna stock will be conducted to incorporate the most recent available data, including any new abundance indices. The scientific advice shall be reviewed and amended, as appropriate, in 2021 by the Commission, with a view to addressing overfishing in 2023 at the latest with at least a 50% probability.

The Multi-annual Management Plan for Bluefin Tuna in the Eastern Atlantic and the Mediterranean was also rolled over, and the TAC for 2021 and 2022 kept at 36,000 t, in accordance with the SCRS advice. However, the 2022 TAC shall be reviewed and amended, as appropriate, at the 2021 Commission annual meeting, based on new SCRS advice in 2021.

The Commission agreed to review in 2021 the interim Harvest Control Rule on the Northern Atlantic Albacore, with a view to adopting a long-term management procedure for this stock.

The Commission could not reach a consensus on the annual catch limits for the North Atlantic shortfin mako. Therefore, the Commission also agreed to hold an intersessional meeting in 2021



to develop and propose additional measures towards achieving conservation and management objectives for this stock.

The Compliance Committee noted that the trend toward improved compliance was continuing, although as was to be expected, the pandemic caused some difficulties in meeting deadlines, particularly in the early stages. Letters will be issued to 36 Contracting Parties in which a range of compliance deficiencies were detected.

Finally, a new amendment was agreed to the ICCAT Recommendation on the Establishment of a Meeting Participation Fund for Developing ICCAT Contracting Parties, together with new Rules of Procedure for the Administration of this special Fund.

List of adopted Recommendations and Reference

- *Supplemental Recommendation by ICCAT to amend the Recommendation 19-02 by ICCAT to replace Recommendation 16-01 by ICCAT on a Multi-annual Conservation and Management Programme for Tropical Tunas*
- *Recommendation by ICCAT amending the Recommendation 19-03 by ICCAT for the Conservation of North Atlantic Swordfish*
- *Recommendation by ICCAT amending the Recommendation 16-06 Establishing a Multi-annual Conservation and Management Programme for North Atlantic Albacore*
- *Recommendation by ICCAT amending the Recommendation 17-04 on a Harvest Control Rule for North Atlantic Albacore Supplementing the Multi-annual Conservation and Management programme in Rec. 16-06*
- *Supplemental Recommendation by ICCAT to amend the Recommendation 16-07 by ICCAT on South Atlantic Albacore Catch Limits for the Period 2017-2020*
- *Recommendation by ICCAT amending Rec. 17-06 for an Interim Conservation and Management Plan for Western Atlantic Bluefin Tuna*
- *Recommendation by ICCAT amending Recommendation 19-04 Establishing a Multi-annual Management Plan for Bluefin Tuna in the Eastern Atlantic and the Mediterranean*
- *Recommendation by ICCAT to amend Rec. 18-12 on the Application of the eBCD System*
- *Recommendation by ICCAT amending Recommendation 14-14 on the Establishment of a Meeting Participation Fund for Developing ICCAT Contracting Parties*
- *Rules of Procedure for the Administration of the Special Meeting Participation Fund*



The ratification of the newly adopted Protocol to Amend the International Convention for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas is ongoing with the FAO.

Capacity building:

Many capacity building activities have been impacted by the Covid and prevented them from taking place as planned.

For capacity building relating to Port Inpseciton, unfortunately, due to the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, the needs assessments of the Contracting Parties foreseen could not be completed. Notwithstanding, work on the ICCAT training module continued during the year, and it is expected to resume activities in a virtual format in the last quarter of 2021, with a view to continuing activities into 2022 and beyond.

Science:

Although the pandemic precluded in-person meetings since March 2020, the ICCAT Scientific Committee of Research and Statistics (SCRS) rapidly re-organized workplan for 2020 and rescheduled a number of online meetings of the different Working Group and Sub-committees, which allowed the provision of the 2020 SCRS advice to the Commission in due time. In addition, the SCRS approved its workplan and meetings calendar for 2021. Although all meetings and workshops have been held online, good progress has been made during the 1st semester of 2021. However, the pandemic keeps impacting the field work activities related to the ongoing studies, and has created additional difficulties on the collection of fisheries data at the national level that is detrimental to the development of some SCRS activities.

GBYP: The ICCAT Atlantic-Wide Research Programme for Bluefin Tuna (ICCAT/GBYP), is a special scientific programme that was launched in 2010. Its aim is to improve basic data collection and understanding of the key biological and ecological processes of bluefin tuna, as well as to refine assessment models and provide scientific advice on stock status. Notwithstanding the difficulties, in 2020 and 2021, GBYP has continued to implement most of the planned activities to achieve this objective.

The most relevant planned activities are several studies on bluefin tuna growth in farms, in which different methodologies have been applied, such as monitoring of individual fish growth through tagging techniques, and intensive monitoring of the entire caged population through sophisticated image analysis systems and acoustic devices. Extensive electronic tagging campaigns that target wild fish have also been carried out in close collaboration with CPC national programmes, which has enabled complex spatial patterns of the species to be discerned. This knowledge is crucial for proper stock management. In parallel, basic sampling activities have continued without any major issues. These samples are used for a variety of analyses (sclerochronological, genetic, and microchemical etc.) that aim to generate key biological parameters and information on population structure and stock mixing, which are required for stock assessment. New methodologies have been tested to provide reliable fishery independent indices, which are also crucial for stock assessment, such as a refined larval survey and pilot aerial surveys that incorporate digital systems to obtain more accurate stock abundance estimates. Moreover, the development of the new assessment approach for bluefin tuna, based on the use of Management Strategies Evaluation tools, which is supported by GBYP, has also continued, according to the SCRS and ICCAT Secretariat workplans. Finally, it should also be noted



that several online scientific workshops have been organised. As a result, useful specific recommendations have been made to coordinate and further standardize the existing research lines, such as electronic tagging, and to develop new ones, such as the Close-kin approach based on genetic techniques for stock assessment.

AOTTP: The Atlantic Ocean Tropical Tuna Tagging Programme (AOTTP), a 15 millions euros funded programme has come to an end in February 2021 after five years of implementation, with an online symposium to discuss the first results. AOTTP has made nearly met all its targets since it began in 2015. ICCAT-AOTTP has evaluated and awarded 43 contracts with a total value of 10,911,434 €. Over 2000 days at sea have been spent on 504 tagging trips throughout the Atlantic. Tagging targets (120,000) will be met, within budget, by the end of the project. Currently ca 119,500 fish (99.6% of the target) have been tagged (R-1) with conventional tags in the EEZs of more than 20 different countries in addition to many tagged in the High Seas. 586 electronic tags (pop-ups and internals) have been deployed and are providing new scientific information on tuna migrations. Scientists and technicians, including women, from developing countries have tagged over two-thirds of all the fish. Formal tag-recovery and awareness raising infrastructures are now in place in 13 countries, with less formal arrangements in another 5 locations, including Japan and the People's Republic of China. Around 16,500 tags have been recovered (overall recovery rate is 14%) for which rewards (t-shirts, caps, lottery entry, cash, and mobile phone top-ups) have been paid. Tag-seeding experiments are ongoing with our extensive network of observers throughout the Atlantic, and reporting rates for the most important purse-seine fleets are: 69%, 78%, and 67.6% for BET, SKJ, and YFT respectively. So far 21,361 fish have been double-tagged, allowing tag-shedding rates to be estimated, and 9,077 chemically tagged which is improving our ability to age recaptured fish. ICCAT-AOTTP partners from Brazil and Senegal have created a pan-Atlantic Otolith Reference Set to standardise age-determination of tropical tunas and routine ageing has begun. Otolith ring deposition rate validation and training work have been conducted with contractors from Australia, Brazil and Senegal. All AOTTP data continue to be uploaded rapidly into relational databases using smartphone applications and messaging applications, which have been also used very effectively to maintain communication between AOTTP and the many field operatives around the Atlantic Ocean. Training in all aspects of tagging at sea, tag-recovery, and data transmission methodologies continues, building on the foundations already made. ICCAT-AOTTP has also organized successful otolith-reading, and capacity-building workshops. Data analysis have been conducted to investigate mortality and movement/migration, and growth. The YFT tuna stock was assessed in 2019 by SCRS and age and mark-recapture data collected by AOTTP played an important role.

International Cooperation:

Cooperation has continued under the context of Covid with regular contacts with sister organizations in order to further strengthen cooperation. These contacts have helped to share experiences in reacting to the pandemic impacts.