

## International Cooperation

### ***Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Coordinating Working Group on Fishery Statistics (CWP-FS)***

The ICCAT Secretariat has partially (due to the clash with ICCAT meeting overlaps) attended (online) the FAO-CWP Thirty Intersessional Meeting of the Fisheries Subject Group (FS), 28-30 June 2023). During 2023, the ICCAT Secretariat has maintained a close collaboration with CWP partners (includes all the five tuna Regional Management Fisheries Organization, tRFMOs)) statistical experts, by sharing the ICCAT most relevant CWP related statistical activities of 2022 and 2023 and collaborating on both technical level and on the solution of various data issues (data corrections, coding systems, application of CWP fisheries harmonization standards and concepts, data exchange, etc.). The five tRFMOs have also informed the CWP on the progress of their online data systems (ICCAT presented the Integrated Online Management System, IOMS), focusing mostly on the development status, technical specifications, and main mid/long term goals. All the five tRFMOs have under development or are planning online data systems. Overall, they have differences in these three aspects but with more similar objectives. It was noted that this sharing of experiences and knowledge among the tRFMOs can reduce those differences in the long run. Other relevant aspects of the meeting involved, the progress on the CWP Handbook, the status update of the [CWP webpage](#), the review of the progress made by the 5 CWP ad hoc task groups. The relevant documents of the meeting are freely available on the CWP website.

### ***Fisheries and Resources Monitoring System (FIRMS)***

ICCAT is a partner of the FAO FIRMS that provides access to information on the global monitoring and management of fishery marine resources. As such the Secretariat provides regular updates for the stock status of ICCAT species (<http://firms.fao.org/firms/en>) assessed by the SCRS.

ICCAT continues to provide data to support its initiative. Currently, the Global Tuna Atlas system (<https://www.fao.org/fishery/en/collection/firms-tuna-atlas>) contains the ICCAT public statistical information (Task 1 nominal catches and Task 2 catch & effort) published on the [ICCAT website](#). It was further noted that ICCAT updated its Data Confidentiality Policy and future data submission will follow those policy requirements.

### ***Aquatic Sciences and Fisheries Abstracts (ASFA)***

Since the last SCRS meeting, the Secretariat has prepared 16 new entries (72.6, 72.7, 72.8, 73.1, 73.2, 73.3, 73.4, 73.5, 73.6, 73.7, 73.8, 73.9, 74.1, 74.2, 74.3, 74.4 and 17.5) for the Aquatic Sciences and Fisheries Abstracts (ASFA-ProQuest) database, from the papers published in the most recent issues of the [ICCAT Collective Volume of Scientific Papers](#).

### ***General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM)***

Under the Letter of Agreement of the GFCM, within the umbrella of the Agreement between the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and ICCAT approved in the 23rd Special Meeting of the Commission (November 2022), the collaboration with the GFCM continued to develop and strengthen in areas of mutual interest to the respective organizations.

The Head of the Compliance Department attended the GFCM Working Group on Vessel Monitoring systems (VMS) and related control system; Working Group on Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU); Compliance Committee. At the first workshop, the Secretariat put forward the findings of the VMS pilot study. The Working Group on IUU considered each Contracting Party on a case-by-case basis. The Compliance Committee considered the findings of the Working Group on IUU which had identified possible issues of non-compliance with GFCM conservation and management measures and considered the needs for future technical assistance to members. The Committee also considered the draft GFCM IUU list, noting the complexities of cross-listing processes and the need to work with other organisations on this. The Committee agreed to advise the Commission on the need for Joint Inspection and Vessel Sighting schemes, and draft measures would be put forward to the next Commission meeting. Another major innovation to be

implemented is the GFCM VMS system, and the consideration of a catch documentation system. The Secretariat will continue to maintain contacts with GFCM, regarding relevant issues and particularly IUU cross listing, and ICCAT Commission to consider a joint workshop on sea turtles with GFCM.

GFCM staff attended several ICCAT meetings (Meeting of the Technical Working Group (eBCD TWG), Meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Catch Document Scheme (CDS WG), 16th Intersessional Meeting of the Working Group on Integrated Monitoring Measures, IMM).

### ***Regional Fishery Body Secretariats' Network (RSN) and FAO Committee of Fisheries (COFI)***

No specific activities have been conducted since the last RSN meeting in 2022. Nevertheless, the Co-Chairs sent a letter to the members in which they urged for regional meetings and sharing, for more updates about organisations' activities, learning from each other with best practices on administrative issues, and coordinating ahead (important) meetings.

Within the tRFMOs, the Secretariat has contacted the tRFMOs for the designation of contact persons in relation to preparation of the three meetings within the Tuna-ABNJ2 project. The coordination work will start soon as the Letter of Agreement (LoA) with FAO has been signed recently.

### ***Tuna Compliance Network (TCN)***

The Head of the Compliance Department attended the meeting of the TCN. The officers responsible for compliance from the five tuna RFMOs met in-person for the first time since 2019, although several online meetings had been held during the pandemic. The main topics discussed were the difficulties in IUU cross listing and possible solutions; recent developments in transshipment programmes and possible joint efforts with the Pan Pacific Fisheries Compliance Network (PPFCN) if appropriate. The meeting was hosted by the North Pacific Fisheries Commission (NPFC), and the Executive Secretary and the Compliance Manager of that body also joined for some of the deliberations. All participants agreed on the usefulness of the network and agreed on the need to continue into the future.

The Head of ICCAT Compliance Department was elected Chair. Therefore, it is vital that the Secretariat fully engage in the work of the TCN in 2024. It is expected that two members of the department will attend the next meeting, which is foreseen either for the first quarter of the year or for June 2024, TBD once all tRFMOs have set their calendars. The Commission is also invited to consider making available funding for the maintenance of the Consolidated List of Authorised Vessels (CLAV) and supporting future initiatives to reduce the burden of IUU cross listing.

### ***Global Environment Fund (GEF) Projects***

In 2021, 2022, and 2023 the ICCAT Secretariat coordinated with the FAO to develop proposals for the Global Environment Fund (GEF) for funding four projects that if funded would begin in late 2022 or early 2023. Projects range in duration from three to five years. The proposals were designed to obtain GEF monies to support priority activities for the science and management of ICCAT species.

ICCAT has four proposals approved for funding through GEF funds. The first project (five years) is to improve compliance with ICCAT conservation and management measures, in particular, but not limited to Port Inspection, which will consist mainly in adding an ICCAT module onto training courses organised by other organisations. The second project (five years) is to enhance the IOMS, here the funding would help support centralised online data management (reporting, validation, storage, availability, etc.) systems that are fundamental to the successful implementation of modern-day conservation and management measures. The third project (three years) aims to generate ecosystem-based operating models for the testing of ecosystem indicators and management policies so that the validity of given indicators for stock status or ecosystem state can be tested to determine when such indicators accurately reflect the underlying stock or system dynamics. The fourth project (three years) will provide technical support for harmonization of technical work between RFMOs. This project will allow RFMOs to coordinate to identify and address common challenges in a harmonized manner, and for conveying key messages to civil society regarding progress in fisheries management, particularly in the context of ongoing Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) discussions and the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement (UNFSA) review process.

These projects will be part of GEF's Common Oceans - Sustainable utilization and conservation of biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction project.

GEF funds will be administered through the FAO Common Ocean's Tuna Project. The ICCAT Secretariat participated in the First Project Steering Committee from 11-14 July 2023, at FAO headquarters in Rome, Italy, and will continue to sit on the project Steering Committee for the project's duration. In August 2023 the Secretariat signed a Letter of Agreement to administer these funds, totalling approximately €1.4 million.

### ***Intersessional workshop of the Sustainable Ocean Initiative (SOI) Global Dialogue with Regional Seas Organizations and Regional Fishery Bodies (RFB)***

Born at the margins of Tenth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP-10) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the SOI initiated its Global Dialogue in 2016. The SOI Global Dialogue, which was developed with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and FAO, provides a regular forum for regional organisations to exchange experiences and identify options and opportunities for enhancing cross-sectoral collaboration at the regional scale, with a view to facilitating the achievement of global goals for the ocean.

The CBD organised this workshop following the Third SOI Global Dialogue in Busan (Korea (Rep.)) last year. Some organisations updated the workshop on their actions in contributing to the implementation of the adopted regional roadmap, insisting on their cooperation with other organisations. The participants also exchanged on the role of the organisations in light of the new global context marked by the recent adoption of texts of worldwide scope, i.e., the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, the BBNJ Agreement, and the World Trade Organization (WTO) Fisheries Subsidies. The participants raised the importance of discussing these issues within their respective organisations to ensure better integration of the relevant measures of these instruments and encourage cooperation among members and organisations for effective contribution to the objectives of these instruments. A strong call was made for more cross-sectoral coordination within member countries between the various departments involved in addressing the biodiversity issues in the global fora.

The workshop also noted the importance of capacity-building as an essential support for the management of biodiversity. To this end, it encouraged the strengthening of cooperation and synergies. The meeting also encouraged the emergence of Champion States for their role as promoters within the organisations of which they are members.

While encouraging a larger participation, the CBD informed that the fourth SOI Global Dialogue meeting will be held in 2024.

### ***Regional Consultation on the Development of a Coordination Framework between Regional Fishery Bodies in the Eastern Central Atlantic Ocean***

Following the same format of the first meeting of this kind that was held in the Indian Ocean in June 2022, this Consultation gathered secretariats and bureau representatives from nine RFBs (GFCM, International Whaling Commission (IWC), ICCAT, Sub-Regional Fisheries Commission (SRFC), Ministerial Conference on Fisheries Cooperation among African States bordering the Atlantic Ocean (ATLAFCO), Fishery Committee for the Eastern Central Atlantic (COREP), Fisheries Committee for the West Central Gulf of Guinea (FCWC), Fishery Committee for the Eastern Central Atlantic (CECAF, Benguela Current Commission) and four regional economic organisations (RECs) (Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Inter African Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR), Southern African Development Community (SADEC)) relevant to the Eastern Central Atlantic, together with FAO experts (who organised the meeting). The vast majority of the member States of the organisations represented in this Consultation are also members of ICCAT.

The consultations benefited from the experience in the Indian Ocean. In preparation for the meeting and in order to facilitate the discussions, FAO sent a questionnaire to the Secretariats to gather potential areas of cooperation on data collection and sharing of information, regional coordination and cooperation, emerging issues, and IUU fishing.

Participants informed about their cooperation, and Monitoring Control and Surveillance appeared to be the area where more cooperation exists as of now. After informing the meeting of its current cooperation with the RFBs, ICCAT, taking into account the important role that the organisations participating in the meeting can play in implementing measures taken at the international level, called for more concrete actions in improving member duties relating to fisheries.

A specific item on IUU fishing was introduced by FAO and discussed by the Consultation, which proposed more cooperation in the region to tackle this issue. The question of capacity building has retained the participants' attention throughout the meeting.

The participants unanimously recognised the importance of cooperation, which creates synergies while avoiding duplication. In the same vein, it was recognised that the existence of organisations in the region offers opportunities for more effective cooperation to help achieve their objectives.

The Consultation agreed on a framework that identified potential priority areas of cooperation without any binding provisions, aiming to facilitate the relations between organisations where relevant and mutually beneficial (e.g., facilitating access to already publicly accessible information, informing on relevant meetings and activities, etc.).

The participants in the Consultation recommended asking the organisations to continue to explore ways of improving cooperation in Consultation with their members, while recognising the usefulness of follow-up meetings on a regular to assess the progress made.

It is expected that the outcome of this Consultation will serve as an experience for the next consultations which will take place in other parts of the world.

### ***Cooperation agreement with Western and Central Atlantic Fisheries Commission (WECAFC)***

Following the adoption of the Letter of Cooperation (LoC) by ICCAT in November 2022, a version was sent to the WECAFC. The latter informed the Secretariat of the changes that FAO incorporated to the LoC. The new changes were circulated to ICCAT CPCs, but the proposed language was not accepted. After some exchanges with the WECAFC, FAO finally proposed Exchange of Letters between the two Secretariats that mirror the initial proposal of ICCAT. During the 19th Session of the WECAFC the Exchange of Letters was adopted, with two minor changes aiming to further clarify the content. ICCAT will review for adoption this proposal of Exchange of Letters in November 2023, which would conclude then a long process for the formalization of the cooperation with the WECAFC.

### ***Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic (OSPAR)***

OSPAR started in 1972 with the Oslo Convention against dumping and was broadened to cover land-based sources of marine pollution and the offshore industry by the Paris Convention of 1974. These two Conventions were unified, updated and extended by the 1992 OSPAR Convention. The new Annex on biodiversity and ecosystems was adopted in 1998 to cover non-polluting human activities that can adversely affect the sea. Under the latter mandate, OSPAR regularly makes data requests of the Secretariat for information on activities within OSPAR's area of responsibility.

The Secretariat participated in OSPAR's Sixth meeting of the Collective Arrangement in London, England, held online between 7-9 June 2023. OSPAR intends to include any competent international organizations to participate in its collective arrangement. It intends to be a collaborative platform for all such organizations with competence in the North Atlantic through which there would be expanded coordination and cooperation. Other organizations including the International Council on the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) and International Seabed Authority (ISA) provided a summary of their activities. The meeting largely focused on the use of marine protected areas and so-called other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs). The new Draft BBNJ Agreement was the subject of a lengthy conversation. It was noted that a key element (Article 4(2)) of the BBNJ Agreement was not to undermine any competent organization; this was interpreted to mean that a competent organization such as ICCAT would have to agree to and/or propose new measures under BBNJ. Accordingly, the Group noted the new BBNJ Agreement would mean that collaboration between relevant RMFOs (including ICCAT) would be needed to cooperatively develop their spatial management plans.

The participants reviewed OSPAR and Northeast Atlantic Fish Commission cooperation on generating better knowledge on deep sea elasmobranchs and collaboration with the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) on identifying Ecologically and Biologically Significant Areas (EBSA) and implementing the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.

The Secretariat communicated that with respect to data requests from ICCAT, it would be useful to know the purpose of these data requests and the format in which they were to be provided and stored. With respect to data generally, they noted that it would be useful for there to be a source containing the polygons of all the proposed or existing Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) or OECMs being proposed. OSPAR's data repositories are located at: <https://odims.ospar.org/en/>

With respect to broad activities occurring within other RMFOs, and the implementation of the Convention of Biodiversity and BBNJ measures, a key message for ICCAT is that it should be attentive to various spatial management measures being proposed by other competent authorities within ICCAT areas. These measures include those under the CBD, the Northeast Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC), International Commission for the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries (ICNAF), and OSPAR's.

### ***International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES)***

Following the issues during the 2022 North-eastern Atlantic Porbeagle stock assessment, the two Secretariats have been in contact aiming to draft a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between ICCAT and ICES to clearly set the basis of cooperation between the two organizations.

Aiming that purpose, in August 2023, a high level (online) meeting between the Secretariats of two organizations took place, and it was agreed to start working on the MoU from October 2023 onwards aiming at the possible adoption and signing of the MoU in late 2024, after the internal process within each organization, which in the case of ICCAT will include the SCRS and the Commission. Among the possible aspects to be included in the MoU, are sharing of data and expertise, namely, but not exclusively, regarding elasmobranch species.

### ***Resumed Review Conference on the Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks***

Among the key issues discussed at the Review Conference were issues relating to cooperation and the role of RFMOs, particularly in the context of global instruments that have recently been adopted or are in the process of being finalised (in particular, the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and the BBNJ Agreement). It therefore called, with particular emphasis, for coordinated action at global and regional level to achieve the objectives of these instruments in relation to the provisions relevant to fisheries, considering that the latter instruments will have an impact on fisheries and should be carefully considered.

The Review Conference also reiterated the importance of the Assistance Fund (Part VII of the Agreement), which was close to being exhausted and which has benefited from a recent contribution from the European Union to strengthen the implementation of the Agreement.

Issues such as Climate Change, strengthening the fight against IUU fishing, and building the capacity of developing States also attracted the attention of the Review Conference.

In their final statements, several delegations regretted the absence of references in the text of the recommendations to the BBNJ Agreement, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, and the impact of Climate Change on fisheries. The Chair also regretted the low level of participation by developing countries in this review.

In the margins of the Conference, FAO organised a side event on cooperation, and the Tuna-ABNJ2 project also organised a side event on its major activities.

***Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) process***

Following the second resumption of its fifth session, the Conference adopted the text of the BBNJ Agreement in June. Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea (DOALOS) will act as Secretariat until the establishment of the Secretariat provided for in the Agreement, which will be open for signature, ratification, approval or acceptance from 20 September 2023. The first Conference of the Parties (CoP) will be held in the year following entry into force of the Agreement, which occurs after 60 Parties have deposited their instruments. This CoP will decide, among other things, on the key instruments of the Agreement, such as the headquarters of the Secretariat, its rules of procedure and its financial management rules. It will also clarify the nature of collaboration, consultation, cooperation and coordination with the relevant global, regional, sub-regional and sectoral bodies.

The adoption of this new BBNJ Agreement complements Part XI on the seabed and the Fish Stocks Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

***EU Regional Coordination Group Large Pelagics (RCG LP)***

In 2023, the ICCAT Secretariat has participated virtually in the annual meeting of the European Union (EU) Regional Coordination Group on Large Pelagics (RCG LP), held in Malta between 26 and 28 June. ICCAT is a potential beneficiary of the outcomes planned by the RCG LP and their subgroups on the provision by EU Member States of fisheries and biological data, through the EU Data Collection Framework (DCF).

Some problems affecting the current DCF development and reporting in relation to large pelagics, were pointed out, as the lack of a database specifically designed to manage the information contained in the AR, the lack on precise information on the location of the samples collected under DCF and of explicit relationships (links, connectors) associating these samples with the studies and the results obtained from their analyses. It was also mentioned that according to the number, type and distribution of the samples and data recorded in the AR, apparently the current DCF large pelagics biological sampling do not cover properly the stock assessment needs. Accordingly, recommendations were made to improve the current DCF LP reporting process, including completing the implementation of a functional information management system, include in the AR more precise information on the geographic location of the samples and to develop a system to update the information on the use and availability of these samples.

Moreover, the new information system on DCF, currently under development, should include more detailed metadata on the storage of DCF samples and its analyses, and be linked to the database that manages the data obtained from these samples. It was also mentioned that if ICCAT decides to implement the Close-Kin Mark-Recapture approach to improve the management of some stocks, this will require the design and implementation of new sampling schemes that should be carried out by the ICCAT Contracting Parties, particularly the EU, since the ICCAT special research programmes cannot assume the massive genetic sampling required by this methodology.

***Mediterranean Advisory Council (MEDAC)***

The Mediterranean Advisory Council's (MEDAC) role includes the preparation of opinions on fisheries management and socio-economic aspects in support of the fisheries sector in the Mediterranean, to be submitted to the European Member States and institutions in order to facilitate the achievement of the objectives of the European Union Common Fisheries Policy.

The Secretariat participated in the online MEDAC meeting on 12 October 2023. MEDAC was informed on the adoption of a Management Procedure for Atlantic Bluefin tuna and a TAC recommendation of 40,570 t for the 2023-2025 period, calculated based on the adopted BFT MP. It was also indicated that in 2023 the SCRS concluded that no exceptional circumstances exist that would warrant deviating from the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) advice under the BFT MP. For the Mediterranean Albacore, it was indicated that in 2022 ICCAT implemented a Rebuilding Plan for this stock (*Recommendation by ICCAT to establish a rebuilding plan for Mediterranean albacore* [Rec. 21-06]) with the specifications that the stock will recover with a 60% probability of being in the green quadrant of the Kobe plot by 2032. In the case of Mediterranean swordfish, it was noted the stock is currently under a rebuilding plan and projections indicated that TACs of 10,000 t or lower will allow the recovery of the stock by 2028 with at least a 60% probability, the reported catch for 2022 was 7,169 t.

Finally, stakeholders reiterated that the increase in bluefin tuna populations in several areas of the Mediterranean has augmented their predation impact on the small pelagic stocks and their effects on local fisheries. They also noted the high mortality of bluefin tuna associated with transfer to cages of fish destined for farming operations. It was requested a scientific analysis of the maximum density of fish in transport cages to reduce this mortality, and the need to report such mortalities.

***Center for the Advancement of Population Assessment Methodology (CAPAM) Tuna Stock Assessment Good Practices Workshop***

The Secretariat participated in the CAPAM Tuna Stock Assessment Good Practices Workshop organized by the National Institute for Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA) and the International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF) on 7-10 March 2023 (Wellington, New Zealand), together about 40 scientists mostly from the Pacific Ocean. The workshop was led by Dr Maunder and Dr Hoyle and the participants discussed each topic based on the presentations by invited world expert speakers.

The workshop covered all the main topics in fishery stock assessment by the integrated age-structured models, including the cumulated knowledge through the workshop on Stock Assessment Good Practices in 2022 in Rome, Italy. Given all the presentations and discussions, the workshop recommendations on stock assessment good practices ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_CFhMETAhDw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_CFhMETAhDw)) will be updated for the report based on several knowledge sources, including the two recent CAPAM workshops, the manuscripts in the special issue presented in the past CAPAM meetings, and recent reviews of tuna stock assessments.

Some of the good practices suggested in the workshop have been applied in the ICCAT stock assessments. The main points of the Working Group on Stock Assessment Methods (WGSAM) Chair's initial views were to use spatial-temporal standardized Catch per unit effort (CPUE) weighted by space, to try estimating stock-recruitment relationship, to use age-specific natural mortality by Lorenzen, to avoid using sex-specific natural mortality, to estimate growth curve inside model (with some cautions, check well the result due to data conflicts), to separate each gear and/or large catch component as fleet, and to estimate double normal selectivity curve (with the possibility of time-blocks). It was also noted that much more work is needed to make diagnostics more useful and objective to accept and eliminate models. It was also commented that there is no standard practice for model weighting. More information is available at [www.capamresearch.org](http://www.capamresearch.org) on the CAPAM workshops.