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ALTERNATIVE MEASURES IMPLEMENTED IN LIEU OF REGIONAL OBSERVER DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Given the difficulties posed to international travel arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, some special procedures were proposed by the Commission Chair and agreed by the participants in 2020 and continued into 2021. These can be found in ICCAT Circulars 2282/20 and 1885/21. It was agreed that *"If the CPC decides to allow the activity to proceed without either a Regional Observer or national inspector/observer, it should make every effort to implement a set of appropriate alternative measures aimed at achieving the objectives of the ROP. Such CPCs are to notify the Secretariat without delay of their decision to allow the activity to proceed and of alternative measures that will be implemented. Such alternative measures and the actions taken will be examined in detail by the Compliance Committee, at its meeting in November ..."*

Alternative measures were submitted by Norway for those deployments in which neither a Regional Observer nor a national inspector could be deployed and circulated through ICCAT Circular 5051/21.

1. NORWAY: DEPLOYMENT OF OBSERVER FROM ROP ON NORWEGIAN PURSE SEINE VESSELS FISHING FOR BLUEFIN TUNA IN 2021

Due to the still ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the Norwegian Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries has deemed it necessary to avoid having an international observer on board vessels fishing for bluefin tuna in 2021. The Norwegian Directorate of Fisheries informed the ICCAT Secretariat of this decision the 1. July 2021.

Background

Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, Norway contacted the ICCAT Secretariat the 20. May 2021 to examine the possibilities of postponing the request for observers for our purse seine vessels, preferably till late June/the beginning of July. The reason for the request was the unstable situation with regards to the various types of Covid-19, the restrictions for foreigners to enter into Norway, and uncertainty concerning the vaccination process. The ICCAT Secretariat allowed Norway to postpone the request for observers till at the latest one month before the start date.

Unfortunately, the Covid-19 pandemic still poses a serious threat, and should an observer or the crew catch Covid-19, it could, in worst case, be fatal. Not only are lives at stake, but even less severe cases of Covid-19 could potentially ruin the possibility for the fishermen to participate in other important fisheries, and thus have grave economical consequences.

The Norwegian Directorate of Fisheries has made a risk assessment for national inspectors/observers, concluding that they will not be allowed on board vessels. The risk assessment concludes that it is nearly impossible to keep a sufficient distance between the inspector/observer and the rest of the crew. Consequently, having an inspector or observer on board will increase the risk of transmitting Covid-19 to/from the crew on the vessel. When it comes to an international observer, the risk of catching Covid-19 while travelling to/from the destination is also considered as a high threat.

Alternative measures

In accordance with Circular #1885/2021, Norway will, to the extent possible, nominate a national inspector or a national observer to act in locum of the Regional Observer. As mentioned previously, the use of national inspectors/observers is not an option for Norway at the moment. We do, however, hope that the situation will change before the Norwegian vessels start fishing for bluefin tuna. Regardless, Norway will take all possible measures to secure that the catch of bluefin tuna is in compliance with ICCAT regulations, and have informed the ICCAT Secretariat that we would like to start a dialogue with the ROP as soon as possible, to ensure that all possible measures are taken in order to participate in the ROP programme. Should the situation prevent a national inspector or observer to act in locum of the Regional Observer, a member of the crew on each vessel will receive training from the ROP.

The Norwegian fishery is less complex than other CPCs fishery, given that we do not have any transfer or farming activity. Thus, there are fewer operations to monitor in the Norwegian fisheries than in many other BFT-fisheries. Nevertheless, due to the situation, it is important for Norway to make the best effort to comply with the requirements in REC 19-04 and ensure that the fishery is monitored the best way possible.

The Norwegian Institute of Marine research has planned on having researcher on board several of the vessels. This might not be possible due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The purse seine vessels participating in the bluefin tuna fishery can, however, be instructed to take samples from their catch, and will receive training in order to do so. To the extent possible, the Norwegian Directorate of Fisheries will monitor the harvesting of the bluefin tuna from the purse seine net to the vessel.

The vessels participating in the fishery will be monitored electronically by the Norwegian Fisheries Monitoring Centre, which is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. As long as the vessel is active in the BFT-fishery, the vessel will send in daily catch reports to the FMC through the electronic reporting system. These reports will be sent even if the vessel has had zero catches. The data from these catch reports will be compared to the catch landed in port. Any interruption in the transmission of the electronic logbooks will immediately be followed up by the FMC.

The Norwegian Coastguard will have access to the electronic logbooks in real-time and control the fishing vessels to the extent possible.

The Norwegian Directorate of Fisheries will notify the ICCAT Secretariat of any changes regarding the participation throughout the Norwegian purse seine fishing season. Any subsequent modification to the annual fishing plan will, in accordance with Rec 19-04 paragraph 17, be transmitted to the Secretariat at least one working day before the exercise of the activity corresponding to that modification.

**INTERIM REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ROP-BFT DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC
(2021 Fishing Season – circulated 1 July 2021)**

ICCAT Secretariat

Following the agreement of the procedures proposed by the Chair of the Commission circulated through ICCAT Circular 2282/20 and extended into 2021 due to the ongoing pandemic, the Secretariat has worked with the consortium contracted to implement the ICCAT Regional Observer Programme for eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean bluefin tuna.

A total of 239 observers were trained for the 2021 observer pool; 62 new observers who underwent in-person 5-day training courses and 177 returning observers who underwent 1 day refresher courses (66 in person and 111 remotely). When held in person, several smaller training sessions were held in different locations, held as close to deployment dates as possible to allow deployment direct from training, and overall reduce the amount of travel required. Training locations included Lisbon, Valencia, Sete, Marsaxlokk, Naples, Split, and Algeria.

Similarly, debriefing is being held in several locations ideally as soon as possible following disembarkation and as close as possible to the port of disembarkation or observer homebase to reduce requirement for travel. These include Lisbon, Oliva, l'Ametlla de Mar, Sete, Montpellier, Paris, Split and Tunisia.

Purse Seine Vessels

The Secretariat is pleased to report that ICCAT Regional Observers have been embarked on all purse seine vessels which have requested observers so far. One observer had to be replaced before embarkation having tested positive, but a replacement was deployed in time. Two other observers were replaced for reasons not related to COVID-19.

One hundred and three (103) of the 190 observers were of same nationality due to COVID-19 travel restrictions including the Algerian, Moroccan, Tunisian and Turkish fleets. Note that these numbers do not include the Norwegian fleet, as the fishing season has not yet started.

Those of different nationalities were deployed on the Albanian, Egyptian, Libyan and European fleets. The Secretariat notes that some requests and/or payments continue to be received late, despite there having been no major change in the procedures for requesting and paying for observers and some requests were sent with incomplete information (e.g. no embarkation port), which delays the processing of the requests.

Farms and traps

Fifty-five requests for farm deployment have been met since the last interim report in 2020 (see ICCAT Circular 5865/20 of 25 August 2020) but several of these have required same nationality observer. However, two deployments involved farms temporarily sharing an observer to monitor caging operations due to the impossibility of deploying a second observer within the requested time frame: 001EU0557 and 001EU0559.

Two observers had to be replaced having tested positive for COVID-19 and was replaced by the consortium following appropriate assurances and measures made by the farm regarding the safety of the farm and accommodation facilities. These were on deployments 001EU0575 and 001EU0584.

Notwithstanding the Secretariat request for new requests to be sent two weeks in advance in order to be able to mobilise and carry out necessary COVID-19 tests, many requests have been received later than the original 96-hour requirement, as indicated in **Table 1** below. In a few cases, an old version of the request form was used, resulting in incorrect lodgement of funds.

Only one trap-only deployment has been requested to date, and the observer deployed was of a different nationality.

Table 1. Farm deployments since August 2020.

<i>Deployment #</i>	<i>CPC</i>	<i>Same Observer Nationality</i>	<i>New Request Late</i>	<i>Extension Late</i>	<i>Deployment Start Year</i>
001EU0575	EU.Croatia	Yes	No	No	2020
001EU0576	EU.Croatia	Yes	Yes	No	2020
001EU0577	EU.Croatia	Yes	No	Yes	2020
001EU0578	EU.Malta	No	No	No	2020
001EU0579	EU.Malta	No	No	No	2020
001EU0580	EU.Spain	No	No	No	2020
001EU0581	EU.Spain	No	No	No	2020
001EU0582	EU.Spain	No	No	No	2020
001TN0583	Tunisia	Yes	Yes	No	2020
001EU0584	EU.Malta	No	Yes	No	2020
001EU0585	EU.Malta	No	No	No	2020
001EU0586	EU.Malta	No	No	No	2020
001EU0587	EU.Malta	No	No	No	2020
001EU0588	EU.Spain	No	No	No	2020
001EU0590	EU.Portugal	No	No	No	2020
001TN0591	Tunisia	Yes	No	No	2020
001EU0592	EU.Spain	No	No	No	2020
001TR0593	Turkey	Yes	No	No	2020
001EU0594	EU.Malta	No	No	No	2020
001TR0595	Turkey	Yes	No	No	2020
001TR0596	Turkey	Yes	No	No	2020
001EU0597	EU.Croatia	Yes	No	No	2020
001EU0598	EU.Malta	No	No	No	2020
001EU0599	EU.Spain	No	No	No	2020
001EU0600	EU.Malta	No	No	No	2020
001EU0601	EU.Croatia	Yes	No	No	2020
001TN0602	Tunisia	Yes	No	No	2020
001EU0603	EU.Croatia	Yes	No	No	2020
001TR0604	Turkey	Yes	No	No	2021
001EU0605	EU.Malta	No	No	No	2021
001EU0606	EU.Croatia	Yes	No	No	2021
001TR0607	Turkey	Yes	No	No	2021
001EU0608	EU.Spain	No	No	No	2021
001EU0609	EU.Croatia	Yes	No	No	2021
001EU0610	EU.Croatia	No	No	No	2021
001EU0611	EU.Spain	No	No	No	2021
001EU0612	EU.Croatia	No	No	No	2021
001EU0613	EU.Croatia	No	No	No	2021
001EU0614	EU.Croatia	No	No	No	2021
001EU0615	EU.Croatia	No	No	No	2021
001EU0616	EU.Spain	No	No	No	2021
001MA0617	Maroc	Yes	No	Yes	2021
001MA0618	Maroc	Yes	No	Yes	2021
001MA0619	Maroc	Yes	No	Yes	2021
001EU0620	EU.Malta	No	Yes	No	2021
001EU0621	EU.Spain	No	No	No	2021
001EU0622	EU.Malta	No	No	No	2021
001EU0623	EU.Spain	No	No	No	2021
001EU0624	EU.Malta	No	Yes	No	2021

<i>Deployment #</i>	<i>CPC</i>	<i>Same Observer Nationality</i>	<i>New Request Late</i>	<i>Extension Late</i>	<i>Deployment Start Year</i>
001EU0625	EU.Malta	No	No	No	2021
001EU0626	EU.Malta	No	No	No	2021
001EU0627	EU.Portugal	No	No	No	2021
001TN0628	Tunisia	Yes	No	No	2021
001MA0629	Maroc	Yes	No	No	2021
001TR0630	Turkey	Yes	No	No	2021