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STATEMENT ON EXPLOITATION OF TROPICAL TUNAS

(Angola, Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Morocco, Mauritania, Nigeria, Sao Tomé and Príncipe, Sierra Leone, Senegal) and South Africa

We, the African coastal States present at the meeting of ATLAFCO in Tangier and South Africa, the authors of this statement, wish to express the following common positions:

1. We remind ICCAT of the rights of coastal States established in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, to conserve, manage and exploit live marine resources, and the rights of developing States, established in the United Nations Agreement on straddling stocks, to develop their own fisheries for highly migratory and straddling fish stocks. We also remind ICCAT of the obligation to meet fully the particular needs of developing States that are dependent on the exploitation of live marine resources, which includes the need to meet the nutritional needs of their populations, or part of such needs.
2. We appreciate recognition by CPCs at the Second Intersessional Meeting of Panel 1 of the shortcomings and inadequacies noted for the allocation criteria listed in Resolution 15-13. It is noted that the criteria on past / present fishing activity only include 2 of the total 15 allocation criteria listed in that Resolution. We affirm that historical catches should not be the main consideration in the allocation negotiations.
3. We recognise that establishment of equitable allocations that take into account all the allocation criteria listed in Res. 15-13 will take time, but transition to a more equitable distribution of fishing possibilities for developing coastal States should start immediately. To address this issue, we request that the ICCAT Commission establish an ad hoc working group to review Resolution 15-13.
4. The transition to more equitable allocations should not depend on increase in the bigeye tuna TAC. Increases in the bigeye tuna TAC will only be possible if there is strong evidence of stock recovery. Recovery of bigeye tuna is determined disproportionately by the actions of the major fishing countries, and is therefore outside of the control of developing coastal States. Progressive transition towards a more equitable distribution of fishing possibilities cannot be contingent on stock recovery, and legitimate and sustainable development of our fisheries should be accepted.
5. The current TAC of 61 500 t should be maintained until more reliable data become available and there is greater certainty as regards the effect that this TAC (and the associated measures) has potentially had on the stock. This is consistent with the advice of the Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS), according to which a TAC of 61 500 t will support stock recovery with high probability. Maintenance of the TAC is also consistent with the precautionary approach, given the number of changes and new hypotheses in the updated stock assessment, and the uncertainty associated with the results.
6. Any proposal to freeze development of the fishing fleets of developing coastal States is not compatible with the rights of those States, to develop their own fisheries and to exploit, conserve and manage live marine resources.
7. While we have supported strict monitoring of catches and effort in the tropical tunas fishery, the large number of detailed obligations currently in place are unsustainable and impose a heavy workload on our administrations. The scope and complexity of the monitoring and reporting obligations are not only a disincentive for participation in the fishery, they are also a disincentive for data submission. Furthermore, a large number of these obligations are obsolete, since they no longer reflect the reality of observation and data collection activities, and do not reflect the technological improvements over time. Therefore, we request that these reporting obligations be reviewed, prioritised and optimised, to ensure that only the actions necessary for monitoring and management are required. We also request that resources be made available to build the capacity of the administrations of the developing coastal States for understanding and implementation of these obligations.