

Original: English

**EXPLANATORY NOTE FOR A DRAFT RECOMMENDATION BY ICCAT TO
ESTABLISH A REBUILDING PLAN FOR MEDITERRANEAN ALBACORE**

(Presented by the European Union)

Following the previous stock assessment in 2017, the stock of Mediterranean albacore has been managed through capacity limitation and temporal closure pursuant to ICCAT Recommendation 17-05. This year, the SCRS conducted an evaluation of the stock based on data available until 2019 and concluded that this stock is overfished (*i.e.* the biomass is below the B_{MSY}) and experiencing overfishing (*i.e.* the fishing mortality is higher than the MSY level). According to the SCRS, catches in the order of 2,700 t, close to the average of the last three years (2017-2019), would allow the stock to recover with a greater than 50% probability by 2032, which is approximately twice the estimated generation time for this stock. Furthermore, SCRS has detected potential non-reported Mediterranean albacore catches by CPCs; however, the magnitude of these catches remains unknown.

The EU acknowledges the current situation of the stock and has decided to table a proposal for a rebuilding plan for Mediterranean albacore. Our proposal is based on a two-steps approach: starting in 2022, we propose a 2,500 t TAC, with a view to achieving B_{MSY} by 2036, with 60% probability. As of 2023, a TAC allocation will be applied, following the conclusions of the dedicated ICCAT Working Group, as adopted at the 2022 Annual Meeting. This plan contains the required management and technical measures to stop the overfishing and to start the rebuilding of this stock.

**DRAFT RECOMMENDATION BY ICCAT TO
ESTABLISH A REBUILDING PLAN FOR MEDITERRANEAN ALBACORE**
(Presented by the European Union)

RECALLING the 2017 Recommendation by ICCAT establishing management measures for the stock of Mediterranean albacore [Rec. 17-05];

NOTING the provisions of ICCAT Recommendation [11-13] and the need to rebuild the stock and to reduce the fishing mortality for stocks overfished and subject to overfishing;

CONSIDERING that the 2021 stock assessment of the Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS) concluded that the Mediterranean albacore stock is overfished and overfishing is occurring, and recommended a level of catch of 2,500 t to meet the Convention management objective to allow the biomass to recover to the B_{MSY} level with 60% probability by 2034;

ACKNOWLEDGING that following the 2021 stock assessment for Mediterranean albacore, the SCRS noted in its advice that there is high uncertainty regarding the characterization of stock status, in particular for fishing mortality;

HIGHLIGHTING that, according to the latest scientific advice, and consistent with the precautionary approach, the SCRS recommends preventing an increase of catches;

CONSIDERING that to prevent an increase of the fishing effort and of catches it is important to ensure that the fishing capacity does not increase;

CONSIDERING that the obligation set out in paragraph 12 of Recommendation by ICCAT replacing the Recommendation [13-04] and establishing a multi-annual recovery plan for Mediterranean swordfish (Rec. 16-05) introducing a closure period from 1 October to 30 November for the longline fisheries targeting Mediterranean albacore (*Thunnus alalunga*), with the aim of protecting juveniles of Mediterranean swordfish (*Xiphias gladius*), should continue to be implemented by all CPCs;

ACKNOWLEDGING that paragraph 11 of Recommendation 16-05 on Mediterranean swordfish foresees two alternative closure periods for this fishery and these closures also affect albacore fisheries in the Mediterranean;

ACKNOWLEDGING the socio-economic dimension of small-scale Mediterranean fisheries and the need for a gradual approach and flexibility in managing these fisheries;

RECALLING the importance that all fleets participating in Mediterranean albacore fisheries submit the required data (catch, effort and catch-at-size) on their fisheries for transmission to the SCRS;

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE
CONSERVATION OF ATLANTIC TUNA (ICCAT) RECOMMENDS THAT:

1. Contracting Parties, Cooperating non-Contracting Parties, Entities or Fishing Entities (hereafter referred to as CPCs) whose vessels have been actively fishing for albacore tuna (*Thunnus alalunga*) in the Mediterranean shall implement a 15-year rebuilding plan starting in 2022 and continuing through until 2036 with the goal of achieving BMSY with at least 60% probability.
2. For 2022, a Total Allowable Catch (TAC) shall be set at 2,500 t for albacore tuna (*Thunnus alalunga*) in the Mediterranean. This shall not prejudice the discussions set to take place in the context of the Working Group referred to under paragraph 3 of this Recommendation.

3. An ICCAT Working Group shall be established in February 2022 in order to establish:
 - a) a fair and equitable allocation scheme of the TAC of Mediterranean albacore;
 - b) a 2022 CPC quota, without prejudice to the allocation scheme referred to in point a);
 - c) the mechanism to manage the TAC.

The Working Group shall, in the context of the establishment of the allocation key, use transparent and objective criteria, including those of an environmental, social and economic nature, and notably take into account *Resolution by ICCAT on Criteria for the allocation of fishing possibilities* [Res. 15-13].

4. A mutually agreed TAC allocation shall be adopted through a supplementary Recommendation at the 2022 Annual Meeting.
5. Each CPC shall limit the number of their fishing vessels authorised to fish for Mediterranean albacore to the number of vessels that were authorized to fish for Mediterranean albacore in 2017 under Article 28 of Recommendation 16-05; alternatively, in 2018 for CPCs which started to issue licenses for their fishing vessels in 2018 following the adoption of Recommendation 17-05. The CPCs shall communicate to the Commission, by 15 January 2022, the year of reference applying to them. CPCs, which used 2017 as the year of reference, may apply a tolerance of 10% to this capacity limit.
6. CPCs shall provide to the ICCAT Secretariat the lists of all sport and recreational vessels authorized to catch albacore in the Mediterranean Sea, at least 15 days before the exercise of the activities. Vessels not introduced on this list shall not be authorized to catch Mediterranean albacore.
7. CPCs shall take the necessary measures to prohibit the catch and retention on board, transshipment or landing of more than three Mediterranean albacore specimen per vessel per day for sport and recreational fisheries.
8. The marketing of Mediterranean albacore caught in sport and recreational fishing shall be prohibited.
9. Without prejudice to the obligation set out in paragraph 12 of Recommendation by ICCAT replacing the Recommendation [13-04] and establishing a multi-annual recovery plan for Mediterranean swordfish (Rec. 16-05), Mediterranean albacore shall not be caught (either as a targeted species or as by-catch), retained on board, transhipped or landed during either:
 - a) the period from 1 October to 30 November and during an additional period of one month between 15 February and 31 March;
 - b) or, alternatively, during the period from 1 January to 31 March each year.

The CPCs shall communicate to the Commission, by 15 January 2022, the closure periods of their choice.

10. CPCs shall monitor the Mediterranean albacore stock and shall submit to the Commission, at least two months before the Annual Meeting of the Commission, all relevant scientific information on catch; size and age at maturity; habitat; impact of longline fisheries in terms of catch composition, CPUE series, size distribution of the catches; and monthly estimation of spawner and recruit proportion in the catches. This data shall be submitted to the SCRS in the format required by ICCAT.
11. In 2023, the SCRS shall provide an updated assessment of the state of the stock on the basis of the most recent data available. It shall assess the effectiveness of this rebuilding plan and provide advice on possible amendments to the various measures within this plan. The SCRS shall advise the Commission on the appropriate characteristics of the fishing gear, the closure period in paragraph 9, as well as the minimum size to be implemented for Mediterranean albacore.

12. By the end of 2023, based on this scientific advice, ICCAT shall adopt, where necessary to comply with the management objectives, amendments to the management framework for Mediterranean albacore, including the revision of the catch limits and alternative management scenarios.
13. Notwithstanding the provisions of Article VIII, paragraph 2 of the Convention, CPCs are strongly encouraged to implement, in accordance with their regulatory procedures, this Recommendation as soon as possible and before the date of its entry into force.
14. This Recommendation repeals and replaces the Recommendation by ICCAT establishing management measures for the stock of Mediterranean albacore [Rec. 17-05].