

Explanatory note on a Draft Recommendation by ICCAT amending Recommendation 22-08

(submitted by the European Union)

Background

At the 2023 intersessional meeting, the EU presented a discussion paper titled “Discussion paper on BFT farming capacity” (PA2_31/i2023).

This discussion paper, aimed to stimulate an exchange of views among Contracting Parties (CPCs) with the potential objective of the EU tabling a proposal to address what it perceives as a need to update the current ICCAT provisions regarding BFT farming and input capacities.

The discussion has proven to be fruitful, especially in distinguishing the significance of two concepts: 'wild input capacity' and 'farming capacity.'

For the concept of wild input capacity, the emerging view indicates a direct correlation with the available fishing opportunities for each CPC. It is suggested that, ultimately, the yearly input capacity should align with the total allowable catches (TAC) agreed upon for that same year. Consequently, any total input capacity figure exceeding the TAC is considered unacceptable.

In light of the discussion concerning input capacity, the EU acknowledges the established direct link between fishing opportunities and input capacity, along with the limitations this relationship imposes.

In contrast, discussions among CPCs have shown a lack of clear relevance when it comes to farming capacity, and there is an absence of a direct link between farming capacity and bluefin tuna fishing opportunities. Additionally, during these discussions, concerns were raised regarding whether farming capacity falls under ICCAT's jurisdiction.

Regarding farming capacity, especially in light of recent developments in aquaculture that highlight the autonomy of CPCs in developing and installing bluefin tuna farming facilities, the EU holds the view that the current limitations on farming capacity, which are tied to the situation in 2018 as stated in Paragraph 21 of Rec. 22-08 (“total farming capacity of the farms that were registered in the ICCAT list or authorized and declared to ICCAT in 2018”), lack provisions to accommodate any expansion or adaptation to yearly needs. These limitations are considered outdated and not pertinent for the purpose of ensuring the sustainable management of the eastern Atlantic bluefin stock, particularly when similar farming structures are concurrently being developed and constructed by CPCs interested in aquaculture of BFT.

In this regard, the EU believes that paragraphs 21 and 22 of Recommendation 22-08 should be removed, and Paragraph 20 should be amended accordingly.

“20. Each farm CPC shall establish an annual farming management plan. Such plan shall demonstrate that the total input capacity and the total farming capacity is commensurate with the estimated amount of bluefin tuna available for farming including the information referred to in paragraph 23.

Revised farming management plans, if appropriate, shall be submitted to the Secretariat by 1 June each year. The Commission shall ensure that the total farming and input capacity in the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean is commensurate with the total amount of bluefin tuna available for farming in the area.”

Notwithstanding the points mentioned above, the EU emphasizes the importance of the ICCAT record of farms authorized to operate for bluefin tuna, as outlined in Paragraphs 61 to 66 of Recommendation 22-08, known as the 'ICCAT Record of Farms Authorized to Operate for Bluefin Tuna.' This record is managed by the ICCAT Secretariat and contains information about farming facilities provided by CPCs, along with their farming plans. It also plays a vital role in determining the active status of these facilities.

Recognizing the significance of maintaining a comprehensive record of farming facilities, and with the goal of establishing a foundational understanding of aquaculture activities for bluefin tuna, which possess distinctive characteristics and may potentially create significant loopholes in ICCAT control regulations, the EU proposes that this ICCAT record of farms authorized to operate for bluefin tuna should include aquaculture farming facilities in open sea areas as well. The information to be provided should be consistent with that required for wild fish farming facilities, as included in the annual farming plan. This includes identifying the structure, the origin of the fish, and estimating the input capacity.

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**Part II:
Management measures****Farming capacity**

20. Each farm CPC shall establish an annual farming management plan. Such plan shall demonstrate that the total input capacity and the total farming capacity is commensurate with the estimated amount of bluefin tuna available for farming including the information referred to in paragraph 23. Revised farming management plans, if appropriate, shall be submitted to the Secretariat by 1 June each year. The Commission shall ensure that the total farming and input capacity in the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean is commensurate with the total amount of bluefin tuna available for farming in the area.
23. Each CPC shall establish an annual maximum input of wild caught bluefin tuna into its farms at the level of the input quantities registered with ICCAT by its farms in 2005, 2006, 2007 or 2008. If a CPC needs to increase the maximum input of wild caught tuna in one or several of its tuna farms, that increase shall be commensurate with the fishing opportunities allocated to that CPC, including live bluefin tuna imports.
24. The ICCAT Secretariat shall compile statistics on the annual amount of caging (input of wild caught fish), harvesting, and export, by farm CPC, using the data in the eBCD system. The eBCD TWG shall consider the development of such a data extraction functionality, and until such functionality becomes available each farm CPC shall report these statistics to the ICCAT Secretariat. These statistics shall be made available on the ICCAT website subject to confidentiality requirements.