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Explanatory note on draft Recommendation by ICCAT replacing Recommendation 19-07 on management measures for the conservation of North Atlantic blue shark caught in association with ICCAT fisheries

(Submitted by the United Kingdom)

It is recognised that blue shark (*Prionace glauca*) is one of the more productive shark species taken in ICCAT fisheries, as evidenced in the 2012 Ecological Risk Assessment, and so should be able to support managed exploitation. However, the SCRS' 2023 blue shark stock assessment noted that the current TAC would have a very low (3%) probability of the northern stock remaining in the green quadrant of the Kobe plot by 2033.

Furthermore, while the SCRS' 2023 report stated that the joint Kobe phase plot indicated that there was "*a 49.7% probability that the stock falls within the green quadrant (not overfished and not subject to overfishing)*", the report also highlighted "*that there is a 49.6% probability that the stock currently falls within the yellow quadrant (overfished but not subject to overfishing)*". Given the marginal difference between these values, more precautionary management measures to reduce fishing mortality and allow population growth are required to ensure the stock is exploited sustainably.

Given that recent reported catches have been considerably below the TAC, it is possible for the Commission to reduce the TAC to catch levels that will maintain the stock in the green quadrant with a much higher probability, without unduly impacting those CPCs in the allocation key. It is timely to do this now given that the listing of requiem sharks under CITES Appendix II, which include Atlantic blue shark, will enter into effect on 25 November 2023.

Given that the 2023 Stock Assessment for North Atlantic blue shark indicated that the average annual catch in the years 2019-2021 was 23,403 t (the corresponding value in the 2023 SCRS Report being 23,353 t), maintaining future catches at this level may be most appropriate.

The UK therefore submits this proposal with an aim to achieve a 60% probability of the northern Atlantic blue shark stock being in the green quadrant of the Kobe plot in as short a timeframe as possible, with a probability of no lower than 50% in the interim period. It is therefore proposed to establish a TAC of 23,403/25,000 t while maintaining the current allocation key and maintaining the 870 t limit for those CPCs without allocations.

The proposal also includes a request to the SCRS to begin considerations on the possibility of developing an MSE framework for the stock.

Finally, the proposal includes a line for the UK's share in the allocation table as established by the Trade and Cooperation Agreement between the UK and the EU, replacing the transfer footnote included in Recommendation 21-10, Paragraph 1, as previously endorsed by Panel 4.

(c) Probability $F \leq F_{MSY}$ and $B \geq B_{MSY}$.

Catch (t)	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033
0	71%	83%	95%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
20000	59%	58%	62%	73%	84%	91%	95%	97%	98%	99%
22500	58%	56%	59%	68%	78%	85%	90%	93%	95%	97%
25000	56%	53%	55%	63%	71%	77%	82%	86%	88%	91%
27500	55%	51%	52%	58%	64%	69%	73%	76%	78%	80%
30000	53%	49%	50%	53%	57%	60%	63%	65%	66%	67%
32500	51%	47%	46%	47%	49%	51%	51%	52%	52%	53%
32689	50%	46%	46%	47%	49%	50%	51%	51%	51%	51%
35000	46%	42%	40%	39%	38%	37%	36%	35%	34%	33%
37500	38%	33%	29%	26%	23%	21%	19%	17%	15%	14%
40000	30%	23%	18%	14%	11%	8%	7%	5%	4%	3%

Source: 2023 SCRS Report BSH-Table 2(c) Kobe II Strategic Matrices for the North Atlantic blue shark stock combined models - joint probability of being in the green quadrant of the Kobe plot (i.e., $F \leq F_{MSY}$ and $B \geq B_{MSY}$). The constant catch scenario of 32,689 t corresponds to the estimated MSY.

Draft Recommendation by ICCAT replacing Recommendation 19-07 on management measures for the conservation of the North Atlantic blue shark caught in association with ICCAT fisheries

(Submitted by the United Kingdom)

RECALLING that the Commission adopted the *Resolution by ICCAT on Atlantic Sharks (Res. 01-11), the Recommendation by ICCAT Concerning the Conservation of Sharks caught in association with fisheries managed by ICCAT* (Rec. 04-10), the *Supplemental Recommendation by ICCAT concerning Sharks* (Rec. 07-06), including the obligation of CPCs to annually report Task 1 and 2 data for sharks in accordance with ICCAT data reporting procedures and the *Recommendation by ICCAT on the Development of Harvest Control Rules and of Management Strategy Evaluation* (Rec. 15-07);

FURTHER RECALLING that the Commission adopted Recommendation 16-12 on management measures for Atlantic blue shark (*Prionace glauca*) and subsequently adopted catch limits for the North Atlantic stock of blue shark in Recommendation 19-07 and as amended in Recommendation 21-10;

RECOGNISING that the listing of requiem sharks, which include Atlantic blue shark, under CITES Appendix II will enter effect on 25 November 2023;

CONSIDERING that the SCRS, having completed its latest stock assessment in 2023, recommended that the current TAC be reduced "*to catch levels that will maintain the stock in the green quadrant of the Kobe plot with a high probability";*

FURTHER CONSIDERING that the catch options from the 2023 assessment that maintain the stock in the green quadrant (i.e., the probability of $F \leq F_{MSY}$ and $B \geq B_{MSY}$ both being >50%) in all years and result in a ≥70% probability of being in the green quadrant after 10 years are annual catches of 27,500 t or less;

FURTHER CONSIDERING that the 2023 SCRS Report stated "*that there is a 49.6% probability that the stock currently falls within the yellow quadrant of the Kobe plot (overfished but not subject to overfishing)*", implying that a more precautionary approach to ensuring the stock remains in the green quadrant is required and further implying that annual catches should be less than 27,500 t;

NOTING that the 2023 Stock Assessment for North Atlantic blue shark indicated that the recent average annual catch (2019-2021) was 23,403 t (thus lower than the TAC of 39,102 t), maintaining future catches at this level should allow a higher certainty of the stock moving further into the green quadrant;

SEEKING, therefore, to ensure that total catch does not exceed [23,403/25,000 t] through the establishment of an annual Total Allowable Catch (TAC);

[…]

FURTHER RECALLING that the SCRS was requested to provide options for harvest control rules (HCRs), with associated limit, target and threshold reference points, following the blue shark stock assessment in Recommendation 19-07;

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

1. To ensure the conservation of the North Atlantic blue shark stock in the Convention area, the following shall apply:

Catch limits for blue shark

2. An annual TAC of [23,403/25,000 t] for North Atlantic blue shark is established. The annual TAC may be revised subject to a decision of the Commission based on the updated advice of the SCRS.

3. The following CPCs shall be subject to the following catch limits:

CPC	
EU	[…]
Japan	[…]
Morocco	[…]
UK	

[a) All other CPCs shall endeavour to maintain their catches at recent levels].

[a) ALT All other CPCs shall ensure that their annual catches do not exceed their average annual catches from [2019-2021]].

b) If in any year the total catches of the North Atlantic blue shark exceed the TAC, the Commission shall review the implementation of these measures.

Recording, reporting, and use of the catch information

4. Each CPC shall ensure that all catches of North Atlantic blue shark in association with ICCAT fisheries in the Convention area are recorded in accordance with the requirements set out in the *Recommendation by ICCAT Concerning the Recording of Catch by Fishing Vessels in the ICCAT Convention area* (Rec. 03-13).

5. CPCs shall implement data collection programmes that ensure the reporting of accurate North Atlantic blue shark catch, effort, size and discard data to ICCAT in full accordance with the ICCAT requirements for provision of Task 1 and Task 2 data.

6. CPCs shall include in their shark implementation Check Sheet submitted to ICCAT pursuant to Recommendation 18-06 information on the actions they have taken domestically to monitor catches and to conserve and sustainably manage North Atlantic blue sharks.

Scientific research

7. CPCs are encouraged to undertake scientific research that would provide information on key biological/ecological parameters, life-history, migrations, post-release survivorship and behavioural traits of blue sharks. Such information shall be made available to the SCRS.

8. In light of the 2023 Stock Assessment and noting that the previous request in Rec. 19-07 to provide options of HCR with the associated limit, target and threshold reference points for the management of this species in the ICCAT Convention area has not yet been addressed, the SCRS shall inform the Commission [by 2025] of the feasibility of a full MSE framework for the species, encompassing an HCR, and suggested timelines for taking this forward.

Implementation and review

9. This Recommendation shall be reviewed in light of the outcomes of the next stock assessment of North Atlantic blue shark by the SCRS.

10. This Recommendation repeals and replaces the *Recommendation by ICCAT amending the Recommendation 16-12 on management measures for the conservation of the North Atlantic blue shark caught in association with ICCAT fisheries* (Rec. 19-07).