

### Opening speech by Commission Chair

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Delegates, Observers, ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, allow me to thank the Egyptian authorities for organising this 28th Regular Meeting of the Commission, and for all the measures put at our disposal to ensure the smooth running of the meeting.

This year's meeting represents a considerable challenge, both because of the importance of the decisions we have to address, and because of the format of the meeting itself. While hybrid meetings are not new, it is new that a significant number of the Contracting Parties are not present here. I want to make it clear from the outset that for me it is essential that our working practice ensures that all Contracting Parties, whether in person or online, feel equally involved in the decision-making process. I am convinced that the success of our Commission depends to a large extent on its ability to ensure cohesion among its members, and I will strive to ensure that all Contracting Parties, without exception, feel fully involved in building that consensus which is our most precious asset.

This year we have, as usual, a long list of issues on which we have to take decisions, as I have already mentioned in my letter prior to this meeting. Let me remind you of a point that I stressed last year: if we are not able to take decisions on these issues, ICCAT will appear as an organization incapable of solving the problems of management of marine resources. And this inability will be used by other international organisations or bodies to try to do our job. I am referring to organisations such as CITES. Let it never be forgotten that CITES often uses the alleged inability of fisheries management organisations to ensure the sustainability of marine species as a justification for its initiatives. If we do not do our job properly, we will be proving them right.

No case illustrates this better than that of bigeye tuna. We are all aware of the difficulty of reaching agreement. This is the kind of issue that is essential to ICCAT. On other things we may fail. But on this, quite simply, we have no right to fail. It is the very existence of ICCAT that is at stake if we do not reach an agreement. We need to make a special effort to reach a consensual agreement, and I am sure we will succeed if we put our minds to it.

I believe this because, as I told you last year, ICCAT has proven to be an effective organisation in managing the resources under its responsibility. At a recent conference on canned tuna, it became clear that the tuna resources in the Atlantic are more sustainable than the average fishery resources in the world, which shows that ICCAT, contrary to what some say, is doing a good job. But there is no room for complacency, we still have a long way to go, and achieving this depends on us alone.

Moreover, this work must be extended to migratory sharks. But only 5 CPCs have ratified the amendment to the Convention. If we do not want others to decide for us on this issue, I urge you to speed up ratification.

This year, as you will have read in my letter, there are other issues that I propose to address: the activity of non-member countries or fleets fishing outside the quotas adopted by ICCAT, and the recent adoption of two new biodiversity conservation conventions.

With regard to the first question, the information available to the FAO in particular shows that tuna catches by fleets from countries that are not members or cooperating members of the Commission are at worrying levels. These catches not only represent a major challenge to our efforts to manage resources, but also a threat to the cohesion of our organisation. As we know, the Commission's Contracting Parties and their industries are regularly called upon to make sacrifices: to fish less than they would like, to comply with

allocations of fishing rights that fall short of their aspirations, to fulfil costly management and control obligations, and finally to carry out fishing activities to increasingly high standards. If, after all these efforts, we find that there are still some fleets that continue to fish without complying with our measures, how can we ask our members to make a greater effort?

This is not a new issue, but it is a complex one, because activity that contravenes our rules can take different forms. It is true that ICCAT has already distinguished itself through its initiatives against illegal fishing, and I hope that we will continue to make progress in this area. But beyond this problem, there are also problems linked to the activities of some countries that do not cooperate with our organisation, and whose fleets fish beyond the limits that we have imposed on ourselves. The question I am asking myself, and which I would like to put to you, is this: are we doing enough to solve this problem? In the past as a member of the EU delegation to ICCAT, I remember adopting trade sanctions against some countries. Today, some of these countries are fortunately members of our organisation and cooperate fully with it. Is this example still relevant today? I suggest we discuss this.

As regards the role of our Commission in the implementation of the recent international instruments for the conservation of biodiversity adopted after our meeting last year, I refer to the new objectives adopted by the Convention on Biological Diversity for 2030 (the so-called Biodiversity 30x30, or Global Biodiversity Framework), the United Nations Convention on the conservation of biodiversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction (the so-called BBNJ Convention). We should also note the Agreement of Fisheries Subsidies adopted in 2022.

The two biodiversity conventions establish objectives for the protection of marine biodiversity, and that can have far-reaching consequences for the fisheries managed by the Commission. To cite just a few, the establishment of large scale marine protected areas, the measures to restore degraded marine ecosystems, the possibility of having to do environmental impact assessments for all our fisheries and the need to cut subsidies and its possible implications on fuel costs and climate transition, they are all challenging objectives that, no doubt, can have substantial implications for our fisheries.

At this point in time, many questions regarding the implementation of these instruments remain open: how to interpret certain objectives, who will decide what, who will be consulted, and so on. ICCAT has accumulated, over the years, an extraordinary level of experience and expertise in marine science and fishery management. These should be extremely valuable for the international community when it comes to implementing these conventions in an efficient and meaningful way. So the question is: should ICCAT play an active role in this implementation? Are we going to be consulted when large marine protected areas are proposed and eventually adopted? Should we take a proactive role in this context or rather wait to be consulted, if that is at all the case? And, whether we are proactive or not, how can we contribute to these discussions when the Commission, and very particularly the SCRS, is already over-saturated with work?

This is to me a fundamental question. The very role of ICCAT as an international instrument for the management of marine resources is at stake: other bodies may take decisions that may leave our Commission almost empty of content. Is this something we can live with? I propose that this year we have, at least, a first discussion about that.

So thank you again for your attention and I trust we will have a very successful meeting.

Thank you, merci beaucoup, gracias, *chukran*.