



Statement for ICCAT's 28TH regular meeting of the Commission

PANEL 1

Cairo, Egypt, November 13th to 20th

Europêche supports:

- *Increasing bigeye tuna's TAC as permitted by the SCRS.*
- *Allocating additional volumes to developing CPCs as well as to CPCs which realised significant efforts to improve the stock status.*
- *Deciding on a clear calendar towards fishing aggregating devices' (FADs) full biodegradability.*
- *Eliminating or reducing down to one month and a half the FAD moratorium, which jeopardises the EU purse seine's fleet sustainability.*
- *Achieving a minimum level playing field for the EU fleet, through the implementation of a vessels' register and a regional VMS, better observation coverage and elimination of at-sea transshipments.*

Rising the bigeye TAC to 73000 tons, based on the SCRS advice

Europêche is concerned by the difficulty in recent years to progress on the revision of Recommendation 22-01 on the management of Bigeye Tuna (BET). Whereas EU fleets have assumed a wide share of the fishing effort's reduction in the last years, Europêche regrets that no significant progress has been made during the intersessional meetings of panel 1 in 2023, despite the improvement in the situation of the bigeye tuna stock acknowledged by the SCRS in 2022.

According to the Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS), the bigeye tuna TAC could be increased up to 75 000 t corresponding to a probability of 64% of remaining in the green quadrant of the Kobe matrix. In addition, the previous year SCRS recommendation indicated that a probability higher than 50% is acceptable.

Europêche:

- calls on supporting the compromise of 73000 tons proposed by Japan and South Africa Improving data collection and transmission for target and by-catch species, which seems widely accepted by other contracting parties.
- supports the adoption of a harvest control rule, ensuring an additional increase of the bigeye TAC provided that the species status as evaluated by the SCRS allows it.
- advocates for the adoption of a multi-specie harvest control rule for tropical tunas.

Ensuring that the bigeye tuna catch increase benefit to developing states without penalising fleets which have realised significant efforts

The European tropical tuna purse seine fleet has achieved significant catch reduction efforts for bigeye those last years, which contributed to improve the stock status. Therefore, the bigeye tuna catch increase should benefit to developing countries, which have the right to develop their fleets, but shall at no cost adversely affect the EU fleet, especially when some developed contracting parties, like Japan, do not consume their quota. It is only fair that those vessels who have made major efforts benefit, even at a small extent, from the TAC uprise.

Concretely, most proposals, including those from Japan-South Africa and from COMHAFAT countries, now propose an allocation based on categories of contracting parties, the EU always being included in the highest category for developed big harvesters, and small harvesters being in the lowest category, with a global rather than individual catch limits.

Europêche:

- can support the categories principle, based on contracting parties' stages of fleet development and catches' volumes.
- supports a permanent redistribution system allowing paper fish to be progressively transferred to a reserve for developing states.
- strongly reject that any overshoot of a lower category's catch limit could be compensated with higher categories' catch limits, including EU, as proposed by Japan and South Africa. This would be unfair for CPCs respecting their catch limits, like EU, and would prevent the economic stability of the established fisheries.
- recommends instead requiring real-time monitoring from all CPCs and fishing management plan for those developing CPCs that are planning to develop their fisheries.

Improving not only FAD management, where required, but also fleets' and vessels management to ensure data reliability and fight IUU fishing

During Panel 1's last meetings, some contracting parties, especially the United States and Japan, requested, in order to increase the bigeye tuna TAC, additional measures to protect juveniles, exclusively in the drifting FAD fishery. Focusing solely on this fishery overlooks the potential for juvenile catch in other fisheries, which are less well-documented and lack reliable observation coverage, through highgrading, discards, or inaccurate reporting.

In addition, in the SCRS advice, projections for bigeye tuna already take into account a proportional increase in juvenile catches, based on a distribution where the majority is purse seine fishing. There is no potential risk that the increase in the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) will jeopardize the sustainability of the resource.

Finally, while catches of bigeye in 2022 are close to the TAC of 62000 tons, the increase in catches is mostly due to increases in catch of Asian longline fleets, which indicates a change of selectivity towards large fish and increased catch rates (catch per unit effort or CPUE). This should allow further increases of the TAC if such catches were projected into the future.

This is why Europêche considers this request for additional technical measures on FADs, including FAD sets limits, to be unfounded. A FAD registry is not reasonable either while there is no proper estimates of active vessels and a Regional VMS.

Similarly, now that the bigeye stock status has improved, it is necessary to reduce the moratorium on FADs, which imposes an extremely heavy economic burden on the European fleet and currently

jeopardizes the sustainability of its economic activity. However some management improvement must be achieved on FADs, especially through adopting a clear calendar towards full implementation of FAD's full biodegradability, as it was the case in IATTC.

Europêche:

- asks the FAD moratorium to be eliminated or reduced to one month and a half.
- recommends aligning with the measure recently adopted in IATTC, establishing a roadmap toward full biodegradability of anchored drifting aggregating devices (DFADs) in 2030.
- opposes establishing juveniles' quota for yellowfin and bigeye tuna.
- rejects implementation of a FAD registry as long as there is no regional VMS.
- stand against FAD sets limits, as proposed by Japan, or any additional technical measure on FADs until a minimum level playing field is achieved with other fleets.

Before adding unnecessary additional burden to the European purse seine fleet, which already applied all EU control rules, including VMS, logbook transmission and catches traceability, among other rules, and which observer coverage is of 100%, a minimum level playing field must be achieved with other fleets. This includes knowing how many vessels actually fish in the ICCAT area, being able to monitor them through VMS equipment and ensure their data's reliability with a decent observer coverage.

For now even the total number of purse seiners in operation is not known and the whereabouts of many vessels, mainly longliners, are unknown. ICCAT should progressively move to step up monitoring of the number of vessels, regional VMS, and then think about other types of registries that refer to devices used by vessels.

Not complying with those basic principles jeopardizes the good evaluation of the stock status and allow IUU fishing to develop.

Europêche supports:

- implementing a regional observer coverage, integrating existing observer programs as proposed by Japan and South Africa, but for all fishing vessels. This is essential for effective monitoring of the fleet as well as for the accuracy of the data transmitted to the ICCAT secretariat.
- imposing a minimum of 20% of all Large Scale Pelagic Longline Vessels (LSPLVs)'s transshipments to take place in ports, in view of a future total elimination of this practice.
- enhancing monitoring, control and surveillance measures including through the implementation of a register of all vessels actively fishing in ICCAT's area of competence and a regional VMS.