

### **Opening statement by the European Union to the Plenary**

The European Union (EU) delegation would like to express its sincere gratitude to the government of the Arab Republic of Egypt for hosting the 28th regular meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT). The meticulous planning and warm hospitality extended to all participants has certainly created a conducive environment for constructive discussions and fostering collaboration. The EU would also like to extend our thanks to the ICCAT Secretariat who, as always, put in a huge effort to ensure the smooth running of ICCAT meetings.

For the EU, the adoption of a management measure for tropical tunas at this meeting is a key priority. After years of difficult negotiations on this file, particularly on an allocation for bigeye tuna, the time has come for contracting parties to make a concerted effort to strike a deal including a more equitable redistribution to developing countries fishing for this stock as well as acknowledging the great efforts already made by the major harvesters to rebuild the stock.

Another key priority for the EU this year is the continuation of improvement of management and conservation measures on sharks. In that regard, the EU is tabling ambitious proposals to put in place robust measures for blue sharks and whale sharks.

As always, one of the main EU concerns is the strict and correct implementation of the ICCAT rules to ensure the effectiveness of the management measures adopted. The EU is tabling a resolution to facilitate the implementation of the high seas boarding and inspection scheme as well as a proposal for minimum standards for the use of electronic monitoring systems in ICCAT fisheries.

The annual meeting should also be a moment for parties to reflect on how ICCAT functions moving forward and what we want to achieve in the organization in the years to come. The post-COVID era has led to a substantial surge in workload and meetings. This is putting a significant strain on contracting parties, the SRCS and on the Secretariat. In this context, the EU wants ICCAT to continue to be a results-driven organisation that functions in the most effective and efficient way possible. The EU calls on contracting parties to use the opportunity of this year's annual meeting to focus on and set out what the main priorities for the organization should be moving forward.

Finally, the EU is enthusiastic about the opportunity to collaborate with all contracting parties during this ICCAT annual meeting. We are convinced that our collective dedication, expertise, and shared commitment to sustainable fisheries will pave the way for positive outcomes.