

INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE
CONSERVATION OF ATLANTIC TUNAS



COMMISSION INTERNATIONALE POUR LA
CONSERVATION DES THONIDES DE L'ATLANTIQUE

COMISION INTERNACIONAL PARA LA
CONSERVACION DEL ATUN ATLANTICO

Madrid, 5 February 2026

ICCAT CIRCULAR # 00752/ 2026

SUBJECT: CALL FOR TENDERS – 2026 BILLFISHES TAGGING CAMPAIGN OFF THE SOUTHERN PORTUGUESE COAST – ENHANCED PROGRAMME FOR BILLFISH RESEARCH (EPBR)

I should like to transmit a Call for tenders for the *2026 Billfishes Tagging Campaign*, which will be carried out within the Enhanced Programme for Billfish Research (EPBR), in line with the SCRS workplan for this year.

I would be grateful if you could distribute this Call for tenders to qualified people and institutions that may be interested.

ICCAT is kindly requesting a quotation for such work, which shall be developed according to the Terms of reference herein attached. The detailed offer shall be submitted **only to the attention of** the ICCAT Executive Secretary, [Mr Camille Jean Pierre Manel](#), and Cc'ing [Ms. Stasa Tensek](#), by **13 February 2026**.

Please accept the assurances of my highest consideration.

Executive Secretary

Camille Jean Pierre Manel

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Attachment: ToRs – 2026 Billfishes tagging campaign off the southern Portuguese coast.

Terms of Reference

2026 Billfish Tagging Campaign off the southern Portuguese coast

1. ICCAT tagging programme and background

ICCAT has a longstanding record of tagging programmes that over the past decade have been extended to other species such as billfishes, which fall under the ICCAT mandate.

The ICCAT Enhanced Programme for Billfish Research (EPBR) was originally established in 1986, and included the following objectives: 1) to provide more detailed catch and effort statistics, particularly for size frequency data; 2) to initiate an ICCAT tagging programme for billfish; and 3) to assist in collecting data for age and growth studies. During past Billfish Species Group meetings, the Billfish Species Group requested that the objectives of EPBR be expanded to evaluate adult billfish habitat use, study billfish spawning patterns, and billfish population genetics. The Billfish Species Group considers these studies to be essential for improving billfish stock assessments.

This Call for tenders concerns the tagging objectives, specifically to fund the electronic tagging (with miniPATs) of marlins in the eastern Atlantic, that have been established for 2026 by the Billfish Species Group, approved by the SCRS within the EPBR planned activities, and endorsed by the Commission at the 2025 Annual Meeting.

2. General objectives of the EPBR tagging programme

Among the EPBR research tasks is electronic tagging, which aims to address several important biological and ecological issues related to blue and white marlin and sailfish species. Main topics being addressed include movements, stock boundaries and habitat use.

Some previous tagging activities in the NE Atlantic took place between 2023 and 2025, and this call aims to enhance the blue and white marlins and sailfish tagging programme. Accordingly, tagging trips are envisaged for carrying out electronic tagging in the eastern Atlantic, with a particular focus on the in the Northeastern Atlantic (off the southern coast of Portugal), during the summer of 2026.

The tagging campaign in 2026 will include deployment of a minimum of 3 miniPATs, to be implanted in **blue marlin** (*Makaira nigricans*), or **white marlin** (*Tetrapturus albidus*) or **sailfish** (*Istiophorus platypterus*). Those follow the priority species determined by the Billfish Species Group in 2025, that were endorsed by the SCRS and the Commission.

In addition to the priority marlin species, in case any of the following pelagic sharks (**silky shark** (*Carcharhinus falciformis*), **oceanic whitetip shark** (*C. longimanus*), **shortfin mako** (*Isurus oxyrinchus*) **longfin mako** (*Isurus paucus*), **hammerhead sharks** (*Sphyrna* spp.), **bigeye thresher** (*Alopias superciliosus*), **blue shark** (*Prionace glauca*) and **swordfish** (*Xiphias gladius*) can also be opportunistically tagged.

Regular (at least weekly) communication by email shall be maintained with the ICCAT Secretariat and Billfish Species Group Rapporteur as specific instructions on how to proceed with the tagging campaign might be given depending on the targets achieved in terms of the priority species.

ICCAT will provide the miniPAT tags and, if necessary, the ICCAT Secretariat and the SCRS and Billfish Species Group will also be available to facilitate training and guidance on their use and deployment.

Bidders should **describe in detail the logistics of their tagging operations, the fishing gears they propose to use and outline how mortality of returned fish will be kept to a minimum**. Tagging will be distributed over as much of the size range of the target species as possible, in the prioritized area. Only specimens classified in Perfect (no visual damage) or Moderate (superficial damage) condition should be tagged (see [Injury codes in ICCAT for TG02.CnvTRc](#)).

Bidders should describe **their vessel's ability to conduct tagging and the equipment to be used to catch and retain alive and in good conditions the marlin specimens to be tagged**. Additionally, whatever boat is to be used, a description should be provided of its capacity to comfortably accommodate and feed the tagging team onboard and ensure their safety during the tagging trips.

An **experienced coordinator will be assigned** to the offer who has specific experience in electronic tagging on billfishes or other pelagic and highly migratory species (e.g. swordfish, tunas or pelagic sharks). This Coordinator will maintain close communication with the ICCAT Secretariat, the Billfishes Species Group Rapporteur and the EPBR Tagging Coordinator, and will **be responsible for directly managing all field activities** related with this offer, the scientific teams onboard, and their training and monitoring. The specific Terms of reference for the duties of this Coordinator are provided in **Annex 1**. He/she will coordinate all the activities, such as selecting and training the tagging team, monitoring the related field activities, i.e. supervising the teams involved, the operating tasks of the fishing vessels and their crews, and supervise data handling and processing. Ultimately, the Coordinator will be responsible for providing all the tagging data for input to the ICCAT tagging database.

The tagging team should **preferably include at least an electronic tagging specialist** with demonstrated experience, and any additional scientific staff deemed necessary.

The budget available at ICCAT for those tagging activities in 2026, on the basis of the tagging design previously approved by ICCAT, is considered sufficient to support the **deployment of at least 3 miniPATs during campaign(s) at sea, with a duration of at least 4 days. In-kind contribution provided by the Tenderer** can be used to partially offset cost of the tagging programme and **will be scored** within the evaluation of the bid.

3. Contractor tasks

The Contractor(s), who will work in close consultation with the ICCAT Secretariat, the Billfish Species Group Rapporteur and EPBR Tagging Coordinator, will conduct the tagging activity in the specified geographical areas and on the specific species that are detailed above.

The Contractor(s) will be responsible for the basic data management and for provision of all data to be included in the ICCAT tagging database, using the forms provided by ICCAT. If any previously tagged fish are recaptured during tagging operations, they will be reported to ICCAT with the appropriate tagging forms.

This contract should be closed by **31 December 2026**. It is assumed that all activities should be completed before the end of November 2026, and the remaining period should be used for data analysis and to prepare the draft and final reports.

4. Details of the areas and numbers of specimens to be electronically tagged and released

The Contractor(s) will provide a proposal to achieve the ICCAT EPBR tagging objectives for the 2026 programme, which will ensure the following:

- a) The target is to deploy a minimum of 3 miniPATs in blue marlin, white marlin or sailfish. The priority area is the NE Atlantic, off the South coast of Portugal. In addition to the marlins, and if possible, opportunistic tagging can include the following pelagic shark and swordfish species: oceanic whitetip shark (*C. longimanus*), shortfin mako (*Isurus oxyrinchus*), longfin mako (*Isurus paucus*), hammerhead sharks (*Sphyrna* spp.), bigeye thresher (*Alopias superciliosus*), silky shark (*Carcharhinus falciformis*), blue shark (*Prionace glauca*) and swordfish (*Xiphias gladius*). Whenever possible, a small genetic tissue sample should also be collected, without damage to the fish.

- b) The electronic pop-up tags will be provided by ICCAT, available from the ICCAT EPBR. Any additional tags for other species will be provided by the respective species tagging programmes, namely the Shark Research and Data Collection Programme (SRDCP) for sharks and the Swordfish Year Programme (SWOYP) for swordfish. Precise instructions will be provided for programming and preparing the tags. The tagging team will be responsible for ensuring that the tags deployed are programmed according to the defined settings specific to the species tagged, including by reprogramming as necessary using the provided instructions.
- c) The tagging team will be responsible for providing tagging applicators and any other materials needed for the tagging process.
- d) The fishing gear and fishing strategy to be used in the tagging should be clearly mentioned in the offer. Regardless of the fishing gear and strategy, marlins should preferably be tagged in the water to minimize mortality. If using fishing gear with hooks, those should be preferably removed, but in case that is not possible, if left attached the line should be cut close to the mouth to minimize post-release mortality.
- e) The total time at sea for the tagging trips should have a minimum duration of 4 days, or until all provided electronic tags have been deployed.
- f) Minimum data to be collected and properly reported to ICCAT include: tag platform transmitting terminal (PTT) and serial number (S/N), species name, size (lower-jaw-fork-length in the case of billfishes and fork length in the case of sharks), sex (for sharks, if possible), detailed tagging location (latitude and longitude), tagging date and time, fishing and gear details. The location of the hook has to be recorded, and if it was removed prior to releasing the specimen. The general condition of the tagged animal should be assessed, and any visible injuries at the time of tagging should be recorded and reported, clearly indicating the location of the injury. For this purpose, codes stated in the ICCAT Form **TG02-CnvTReRc** should be used.
- g) If possible, conventional tags should also be implanted on specimens tagged with miniPATs, as well as on other non-retained species of interest captured and released during the trips. Those should be implanted on the dorsal musculature below the dorsal fin. The conventional tags will be provided by ICCAT. The data to be collected and reported to ICCAT is the same as the data from the electronic tags.
- h) If possible, the following data and samples should also be collected from any dead specimens: 1) date, location, species name, lower-jaw-fork-length, sex and maturity stage, 2) genetic (muscle) sample, 3) otoliths and the second ray of the anal fin. The biological sampling shall be coordinated with the EPBR task leaders on ageing and genetics, as the needs of such samples from billfishes depend on the areas and sizes.
- i) If possible, and as a secondary objective, whenever caught in good condition, any swordfish or pelagic sharks from the species listed above should also be tagged opportunistically with the miniPATs and conventional tags to be provided by ICCAT.

5. Deliverables

- #1 A **short report** will include the identification of the Tagging Coordinator, all protocols for tagging, the vessel chartering agreements and availability and the short description of the work carried out up to that date, to be submitted at the latest **30 days after signature of the contract or 15 days before the start of the tagging campaign (whatever occurs first)**. The Billfish Species Group Rapporteur and the SCRS Chair, in consultation with the ICCAT Secretariat, will review the deliverable and communicate any necessary revisions (if applicable) to the Contractor and/or inform of approval within 5 days of the submission of this deliverable. The Contractor will submit the revised final documents (if changes are requested) within 10 days after the aforementioned 5-day period.

- #2** A **short report** on the activities carried out will be **prepared as an SCRS document** and submitted at the latest by **7 September 2026**, to be presented to the Billfish Species Group September meeting. The report shall be prepared as a SCRS document and include the description of the work carried out up to that date, the number of tagged specimens in the various areas (by tag type), any number of biological samples collected at the date. The Billfish Species Group, its Rapporteur and the SCRS Chair, in consultation with the ICCAT Secretariat, will review the deliverable and communicate any necessary revisions (if applicable) to the Contractor and/or inform of approval within 5 days of the submission(s). The Contractor will submit the revised final documents (if changes are requested), within 30 days after the aforementioned 5-days period.
- #3** The **Draft Final Report** will be submitted to the ICCAT Secretariat by **30 November 2026** at the latest, including the following:
- Full description of the work carried out for the tagging activities in the various areas, with the total number of tagged billfishes and specification;
 - Detailed description of the methodology and protocols;
 - Maps of the areas in which the tagging was carried out;
 - Detailed ICCAT forms (TG03-ElTReRc) with the definitive number of tagged specimens by area, size composition and type of tag (miniPATs or miniPATs + conventional tag);
 - Detailed report of all specimens caught, including: species, size, sex, fate (retained or discarded), condition at haulback and when discarded;
 - Any possible recommendations for adjusting the tagging strategy for both electronic and conventional tagging in future phases of this project;
 - An Executive Summary.
- #4** The **Final Report** will be prepared taking into account any comments provided (no later than **10 December 2026**) by ICCAT and the relevant SCRS Officers, and will be submitted, along with the full administrative report including copies of all the administrative documents, by **31 December 2026**, at the latest.

6. Contractor minimum qualifications

- Documented multi-year experience in research related to oceanic, pelagic and highly migratory species, including large scale tagging that has included tagging using pop-up satellite archive tags.
- Availability of sufficiently qualified scientific and technical staff to carry out the duties.
- Availability of the necessary vessel(s) to carry out the duties.
- Availability of at least one specialist in managing tagging databases.
- Excellent working knowledge of one of the three official languages of ICCAT (English, French, Spanish). A high level of knowledge of English is highly desirable.

7. Request for bids

Interested entities should submit an offer by e-mail **only** to the attention of the ICCAT Executive Secretary, **Mr Camille Manel** and **Ms. Stasa Tensek**, by **13 February 2026**, including:

- Acknowledgment of this Call for tenders.
- A detailed offer, based on the objectives of this Call for tenders, describing the methodologies to deploy the minimum number of miniPAT tags, the protocols to be adopted and the structure of the data set aiming the Draft Final Report (**Deliverable #3**) and the Final Report (**Deliverable #4**).
- The curricula of the scientific staff.
- The curriculum of the institution(s) or entity(ies) applying for the ICCAT tagging activity, with any documented experience in these fields, to include recent and relevant contracts for the same or similar items and other references (including contract numbers, points of contact with telephone numbers and other relevant information).

- e) An estimated budget for the tagging activity and for including the data in the ICCAT tagging database, to be detailed by individual components (e.g. tagging staff, organization staff including the time for data input, vessel hire (if applicable), operational costs, travels, consumables, etc.), any discount terms (overhead to cover administrative and general costs could be admitted within a maximum limit of 10% of the personnel costs), as well as any in-kind contributions.
- f) The name, address, and telephone number of the tendering body and the focal point for the tagging and reporting components.
- g) The bank account of the tendering body, (bank name, bank address, name of account holder, account number, IBAN and SWIFT codes), and the tax identification code.
- h) The institutional and administrative background of the tendering body (e.g. statutes, type of institution, annual budget, budget control procedures, etc.).
- i) A detailed list of any subcontracting activities.
- j) A declaration that the offering institution will follow this Call for tenders, and/or approved modifications agreed upon, and the administrative rules specified in the contract.
- k) A declaration that all the comments eventually made on the Draft Final Report (**Deliverable #3**) will be incorporated in the Final Report (**Deliverable #4**) prior to submission to the ICCAT SCRS.
- l) A declaration that the staff and all the subcontracted staff will be covered by full insurance for the tagging activities to be carried out according to the Call for tenders, excluding ICCAT from all responsibility concerning the work to be done by each offering institution.
- m) A statement specifying the extent of agreement with all terms, conditions, and provisions herein included, particularly specifying the date for the Draft Final Report (**Deliverable #3**) and the date for the Final Report (**Deliverable #4**).

In the case of a consortium or group of entities, an administrative and a scientific responsible entity should be identified. Subcontracts can be admitted up to a limit of 40% of the total budget and they will be detailed in the proposal.

The ICCAT Secretariat will make a selection of the offers in consultation with the SCRS Chair, Billfish Species Group Rapporteur, and EPBR Tagging Coordinator. The ICCAT Secretariat will notify the result of the selection process as soon as possible.

Offers that fail to furnish the required documentation or information, or that reject the terms and conditions of the Call for tenders will not be considered.

Contractors can be either research institutions, such as government or private laboratories, universities, private firms, individual scientists or other entities having the qualifications required.

The Contractor should be available to report to any meeting requested by ICCAT.

8. Payment details

Disbursements will be made according to the following schedule:

1. **40% of the total amount of the contract upon signing of the contract** and after receiving a regular invoice which may be submitted at the latest 30 days after the signature of the contract.
2. **20% of the total amount of the contract upon completion and acceptance of Deliverable #1** and after receiving a regular invoice.
3. **20% of the total amount of the contract upon completion and acceptance of Deliverable #3** and after receiving a regular invoice.
4. **20% of the total amount of the contract after the approval of Deliverable #4**, after receiving a regular invoice according to work proposal and a complete set of documents concerning the expenses incurred under the contract.

9. Selection of proposals

The ICCAT Secretariat will review the offer(s). Following the review process, the ICCAT Executive Secretary will notify the entity selected for the contract as soon as the selection process is completed. The contract will be awarded on the basis of competitive tendering and the evaluation of proposals will be undertaken objectively, consistently and without bias towards particular suppliers.

Proposal(s) will be evaluated against a pre-determined set of criteria, which include: i) cost (25%); ii) proven track record (20%); iii) technical merit based on work plan (25%); iv) providing in-kind contributions to the budget (20%); and v) flexibility as regards future changes in requirements (10%).

10. Logistics

All documents provided by the Contractor must be in MS Word or compatible software; tables must be in Excel format or compatible; figures and pictures must be in JPEG or TIFF format or compatible. Tagging data will be included in the ICCAT tagging database. All documents submitted must be in English.

11. Copyright

All the material produced by the Contractor will remain the property of the ICCAT, will be kept confidential, and cannot, in any case, be circulated by the Contractor. The scientific use of the data by the Contractor will always be notified to ICCAT in advance for clearance.

For further information concerning this Call for tenders, please contact [Dr Miguel Neves dos Santos](#) at the ICCAT Secretariat.

Duties and Responsibilities of the Tagging Coordinator

The duties and responsibilities of the Tagging Coordinator for each tender will be as follows:

- Be the liaison officer between the Contractor, the ICCAT Secretariat and EPBR Tagging Coordinator for all practical issues concerning the tagging activities. This will include consultation regarding when tagging of species of secondary priority may commence (e.g. if primary priority species are persistently unavailable) and communicating this to the tagging team.
- Selection and training of the staff engaged in the tagging programme at sea, organising the necessary training course if needed.
- Implement the logistical and operational components of the tag release activities, including cruise planning, tagger training and supervision of all aspects of the operational releases.
- Ensure that all data collected as part of the release activities of tags under the ICCAT EPBR are properly recorded, transcribed in electronic form and provided to ICCAT Tagging Data Manager and to the EPBR Tagging Coordinators.
- Ensure collection of all biological samples requested under the contract and ensure their delivery to the team (s) in charge of the biological studies, according to the sampling protocols specified.
- Possibly support the Contractor for vessel chartering, contracting staff for tagging operations while purchasing any of the gears required to properly implement the tagging programme.
- Prepare written reports, as required, summarizing all tag release and recovery activities.
- If needed, and in collaboration with the ICCAT EPBR Tagging Coordinators and ICCAT Secretariat, implement tag promotional and recovery activities. This will possibly entail travel and contacting major shark landing ports and direct liaison with the fishing industry and scientists involved with fisheries catching pelagic sharks.
- Other activities, as required, to ensure successful implementation of the ICCAT EPBR tagging programme.
- Work in constant, close cooperation with the ICCAT Secretariat and EPBR Tagging Coordinators, keeping them informed of all the details, any possible difficulties, and progress made.