



ICCAT Press Release

ICCAT closes the 2020 discussions on essential Commission business, avoiding Atlantic tuna and tuna like fisheries being unregulated throughout 2021

Closure of essential Commission business in 2020 in lieu of the 22nd Special meeting of the Commission

17 February 2021, Madrid, Spain – The COVID-19 pandemic has caused substantial problems throughout 2020, with several of the Contracting Parties, Cooperating Parties, Entities or Fishing Entities of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) among the most impacted countries worldwide. The usual ICCAT decision making process was also highly impacted, with all discussions being held by correspondence. Although the conditions were far from ideal, it was possible to take the necessary decisions to avoid ICCAT fisheries being unregulated throughout 2021.

The Commission convened through correspondence to evaluate the results of the 2020 work plan together with the current status of application of the regulatory measures in force and to establish the conservation and management measures for the future. In 2020, full scientific stock assessments were carried out for four species: **bluefin tuna** (*Thunnus thynnus*) and **Atlantic albacore** (*Thunnus alalunga*), **Mediterranean swordfish** (*Xiphias gladius*) and **porbeagle shark** (*Lamna nasus*). In total, nine new Recommendations and one Reference document were adopted covering relevant issues on Atlantic tuna and tuna-like species conservation and fisheries management.

A wave of cooperation allowed for the roll-over of the multi-annual conservation and management programme for tropical tunas, which implies a total allowable catch (TAC) for bigeye tuna of 61,500 t for 2021. The annual TAC for yellowfin will remain at the current level of 110,000 t. In addition, in order to reduce the fishing mortality of juvenile bigeye and yellowfin tuna, the three months prohibition on the use of fish aggregating devices (FADs) in 2021 was maintained, as was the reduction on the maximum number of FADs deployed by vessels, as agreed in 2019. Finally, it was decided that intersessional meetings of Panel 1 will be held in 2021 to review existing measures and, *inter alia*, develop catch limits and associated catch verification mechanisms for 2022.

An amendment was agreed to the *Recommendation by ICCAT for an Interim Conservation and Management Plan for Western Atlantic Bluefin Tuna* (Rec. 17-06), which expired at the end of 2020. The annual TAC, inclusive of dead discards, of 2,350 t was kept for 2021. In 2021, a new stock assessment for the western Atlantic bluefin tuna stock will be conducted to incorporate the most recent available data, including any new abundance indices. The TAC shall be reviewed and amended, as appropriate, in 2021 by the Commission on the advice of the SCRS, with a view to addressing overfishing in 2023 at the latest with at least a 50% probability.



INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE CONSERVATION OF ATLANTIC TUNAS

The Multi-annual Management Plan for Bluefin Tuna in the Eastern Atlantic and the Mediterranean was also rolled over, and the TAC for 2021 and 2022 kept at 36,000 t, in accordance with the SCRS advice. However, the 2022 TAC shall be reviewed and amended, as appropriate, at the 2021 Commission annual meeting, based on new SCRS advice in 2021.

For the northern albacore stock, the Commission agreed to establish a new TAC for 2021 calculated on the basis of the interim Harvest Control Rule (HCR) as well as allocations. The Commission also agreed to review in 2021 the interim HCR, with a view to adopting a long-term management procedure for this stock.

The Commission could not reach a consensus on the annual catch limits for the North Atlantic shortfin mako. Therefore, the Commission also agreed to hold an intersessional meeting in 2021 to develop and propose additional measures towards achieving conservation and management objectives for this stock.

The Compliance Committee noted that the trend toward improved compliance was continuing, although as was to be expected, the pandemic caused some difficulties in meeting deadlines, particularly in the early stages. Letters will be issued to 40 Contracting Parties, Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties, Entities or Fishing Entities in which a range of compliance deficiencies were detected.

Finally, a new amendment was agreed to the *Recommendation by ICCAT Amending Recommendation 11-26 on the Establishment of a Meeting Participation Fund for Developing ICCAT Contracting Parties* (Rec. 14-14), together with new Rules of Procedure for the Administration of this special Fund.

The ICCAT Chair, Mr. Raul Delgado, in his final letter, thanked all Contracting Parties for their commitment to avoid ICCAT fisheries being in an unregulated situation throughout 2021. However, he also highlighted that no consensus could be reached on the implementation of management and conservation measures for several stocks which show important signs for concern. Therefore, he urged ICCAT Contracting Parties to start bilateral or multilateral consultations to overcome some of the difficulties inherent to the most relevant issues that will be addressed in the 2021 Commission meetings.

Finally, ICCAT would like to express its sincerest gratitude to all CPCs and its partners for their valuable contributions to the success of this decision-making process. We will be looking forward to meeting you in November 2021 at the 27th Regular meeting of the Commission.

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List of adopted Recommendations and Reference

- *Supplemental Recommendation by ICCAT to amend the Recommendation 19-02 by ICCAT to replace Recommendation 16-01 by ICCAT on a Multi-annual Conservation and Management Programme for Tropical Tunas*
- *Recommendation by ICCAT amending the Recommendation 19-03 by ICCAT for the Conservation of North Atlantic Swordfish*
- *Recommendation by ICCAT amending the Recommendation 16-06 Establishing a Multi-annual Conservation and Management Programme for North Atlantic Albacore*
- *Recommendation by ICCAT amending the Recommendation 17-04 on a Harvest Control Rule for North Atlantic Albacore Supplementing the Multi-annual Conservation and Management programme in Rec. 16-06*
- *Supplemental Recommendation by ICCAT to amend the Recommendation 16-07 by ICCAT on South Atlantic Albacore Catch Limits for the Period 2017-2020*
- *Recommendation by ICCAT amending Rec. 17-06 for an Interim Conservation and Management Plan for Western Atlantic Bluefin Tuna*
- *Recommendation by ICCAT amending Recommendation 19-04 Establishing a Multi-annual Management Plan for Bluefin Tuna in the Eastern Atlantic and the Mediterranean*
- *Recommendation by ICCAT to amend Rec. 18-12 on the Application of the eBCD System*
- *Recommendation by ICCAT amending Recommendation 14-14 on the Establishment of a Meeting Participation Fund for Developing ICCAT Contracting Parties*
- *Rules of Procedure for the Administration of the Special Meeting Participation Fund*