



ICCAT NEWSLETTER

No. 32, September 2020

Note from the ICCAT Executive Secretary

Dear friends of the tuna world,

I sincerely hope that this newsletter finds you, your loved ones and your colleagues safe and in good health given the unprecedented situation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, which has brought about many changes at all levels.

These changes imposed on us by Covid-19 have not affected our determination, and we have quickly adapted to the "new reality" with its raft of restrictions with the objective of maintaining the continuity of our activities and delivering. As a result, the Secretariat has been closed since mid-March and the staff have been teleworking, while all in-person meetings have been cancelled. Notwithstanding, the majority of the SCRS intersessional meetings have been successfully held virtually, and the reports of these meetings, as well as the [2020 SCRS Advice to the Commission](#), have been published on the [current meetings page of the ICCAT website](#). In addition, the Secretariat has also ensured the continuity and satisfactory delivery of its regular activities. These achievements have only been possible due to the collaboration and cooperative spirit of all those involved as well as the enormous efforts that have been made by the staff working very hard remotely.

Our focus is now on the Commission work, following the Chair's proposal regarding the 2020 Commission process, with settlement of major issues by correspondence for adoption of agreements in late November.

Although the situation has not improved as quickly as we had expected at the start of the pandemic, I trust the ability of the ICCAT community to continue to react and adapt. From the Secretariat's side, I should like to reiterate our full commitment to continued delivery.

Wishing you all the best and hoping that we will get back to normal shortly,

Please take extra care and stay healthy!

Happy reading!

Camille Jean Pierre Manel

Introduction

The Secretariat has participated in six international meetings:

- **CITES_FAO Planning Meeting**, Next Steps for Implementing the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) through Fisheries Legal Frameworks, 17-18 February 2020, FAO Headquarters, Rome, Italy
- **Réunion des Autorités de pêche d'Etats d'Amérique latine sur le projet de texte révisé relatif au processus BBNJ**, 3-4 February 2020, Panama City, Panama
- **International Whaling Commission Scientific Committee's Bycatch Working Group meeting**, held 12-24 May online



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CONSERVACION DEL ATUN ATLANTICO

- **The Western Pacific Fisheries Management Council's International Workshop on Area-Based Management of Blue Water Fisheries, held 15-17 June online**
- **EU Regional Coordination Group on Large Pelagics (RCG-LPs), held 25-26 June online**
- **Fish and Ships workshop, held 30-31 July online**
- **EU Liaison meeting, held 24-25 September online**

RECENT MEETINGS THAT HAVE TAKEN PLACE SINCE THE LAST ISSUE

Commission meetings

- [Working Group on Bluefin Tuna Control and Traceability Measures \(2-4 March, Madrid, Spain\)](#)
- [Intersessional Meeting of the Panel 2 \(5-6 March, Madrid, Spain\)](#)

SCRS meetings

- [Intersessional Meeting of the Swordfish Tuna Species Group \(16-20 March, Online\)](#)
- [Intersessional meeting of the Sub-committee on Ecosystems \(4-6 May, Online\)](#)
- [Intersessional meeting of the Working Group on Stock Assessment Methods \(7-8 May, Online\)](#)
- [Intersessional Meeting of the Bluefin Tuna Species Group \(14-22 May, Online\)](#)
- [Mediterranean Swordfish Stock Assessment Meeting \(25 May-2 June, Online\)](#)
- [Swordfish MSE Technical Group Meeting \(4-5 June, Online\)](#)
- [Porbeagle Stock Assessment Meeting \(15-22 June, Online\)](#)
- [Atlantic Albacore Stock Assessment Meeting \(29 June-8 July, Online\)](#)
- [SCRS Species Group meetings \(BIL, SMT, TROP\) \(13-15 July, Online\)](#)
- [Second Intersessional Meeting of the Bluefin Tuna Species Group \(including stock assessment update and MSE work\) \(20-28 July, Online\)](#)
- [SCRS Species Group meetings \(SWO, SHK, ALB, BFT, SC-STATS, TROP\) \(31 August-9 September, Online\)](#)
- [Second Intersessional Meeting of the ICCAT Bluefin Tuna MSE Technical Group \(28-30 September, Online\)](#)

Upcoming meetings

Postponed

- Meeting of the Working Group for the Development of an Online Reporting System (IOMS) (TBD)
- [Workshop on Atlantic Bluefin Tuna Tagging \(TBD\)](#)
- Workshop on the potential use of Close Kin methods for the assessment of Eastern Atlantic Bluefin tuna stock (TBC)
- Symposium of the Atlantic Ocean Tropical tuna Tagging Programme (AOTTP) (12-14 January 2021, Online)

Cancelled meetings

- Bluefin tuna eastern stock larval index surveys coordination workshop
- Intersessional Meeting of the Panel 1 (20-23 April, Ponta Delgada, São Miguel, Azores)
- 14th Meeting of the IMM Working Group (4-7 May, Madrid, Spain)
- Bigeye Tuna and Skipjack Data Preparatory Meeting (19-23 June, Dakar, Senegal)
- Intersessional Meeting of the Panel 4 (6-9 July, Santiago de Compostela, Spain)
- Intersessional Meeting of the Panel 1 (1-3 September, Ponta Delgada, São Miguel, Azores)
- 14th Meeting of the IMM Working Group (4-7 September, Ponta Delgada, São Miguel, Azores)



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CONSERVACION DEL ATUN ATLANTICO

- Meeting of the Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS) (28 September to 2 October, Madrid, Spain)
- Intersessional Meeting of the Compliance Committee (COC) (21-22 November, Antalya, Turkey)
- 22nd Special Meeting of the Commission (23-30 November, Antalya, Turkey)

ICCAT Data Collection and Research programmes

During the last six months the ICCAT *Atlantic-wide Research Programme on Bluefin Tuna (GBYP)* has continued to carry out most of the activities planned for Phase 10 of the programme in spite of the difficult circumstances resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The new studies within the broad GBYP biological sampling and analysis programme have been launched, as well GBYP support to the MSE process. The study on bluefin tuna growth in farms in response to the Commission request has also continued, and has even been strengthened, by providing support to the new SCRS subgroup on growth in farms, and initiating further studies involving novel technologies, such as those combining acoustic techniques, stereo-cameras and Image Analysis systems. Regarding electronic tagging, a new approach based on close cooperation with ongoing CPC tagging programmes has been implemented, with the signing of 5 Memoranda of Understanding with different research institutions on both sides of the Atlantic. Unfortunately, some activities have been postponed, such as the presential workshops on close-kin methods and electronic tagging, which will be held online in the forthcoming months, or cancelled, as in the case of the 2020 aerial surveys. In relation to this latter activity, an in-depth global review of the aerial surveys programme by external experts is currently ongoing, aiming at providing recommendations for the future of this line of research. Additional information can be found [here](#).

Tagging under the ICCAT *Atlantic Ocean Tropical tuna Tagging Programme (AOTTP)* has almost finished. During the project 120,000 tropical tuna were tagged and over 17,000 fish were recovered with metadata. Due to problems caused by the pandemic the AOTTP project has been granted an extension until the end of February 2021 and the Final Symposium will now be held online between 12 and 14 January 2021. More information can be found [here](#).

Small Tunas Year Programme (SMTYP)

In 2020 a new Consortium led by FADURPE (Brazil) was organized involving 12 entities from 7 CPCs, and a new contract was signed to further develop the SMTYP in 2020/2021. The objective of the contract is to: i) fill spatial-temporal gaps in sampling detected in the second contract report; ii) estimate growth and maturity parameters for LTA and BON, and provide preliminary results for WAH; and, iii) continue with the study of the stock structure for BON, LTA and WAH. The field activities have been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, however recently some laboratories have re-opened and are processing samples and carrying out data analyses.

Enhanced Programme for Billfish Research (EPBR) continued its activities, although sample collection in industrial fleets has been greatly impacted by the pandemic. However, a new contract was signed with the Institut Senegalais de Recherches Agricoles / Centre de Recherches Océanographiques de Dakar /Thiaroye (ISRA/CRODT from Senegal), involving 6 institutions from 5 CPCs, aiming to continue the collection of biological samples for the studies of growth of billfishes in the eastern Atlantic. The objectives of EPBR now also include the evaluation of adult billfish habitat use, spawning patterns and population genetics, as these studies are essential to improve billfish assessments. In addition, a short-term contract is being discussed for a study on Atlantic blue marlin reproductive biology in the Gulf of Mexico.



Shark Research and Data Collection Programme (SRDCP) continued to focus its efforts on four major activities, which are essential for the provision of advice to the Commission, including the following aspects: pan-Atlantic age and growth studies; population genetics to investigate stock structure and phylogeography; stock boundaries, migrations and habitat use; and, post-release mortality on pelagic longline fisheries. In addition, SRDCP has expanded its studies to cover current knowledge gaps on several different shark species (silky, oceanic whitetip and hammerhead sharks), which were ranked of high vulnerability in the Ecological Risk Assessments (ERA) conducted by the SCRS. Further research activities include the deployment of electronic pop-up satellite tags, which due to the COVID-19 could not be deployed during the past 6 months, but are now being resumed.

In addition to the above mentioned activities, in support of the work of the SCRS, the Secretariat has recently signed contracts with Consortia and/or entities to: i) help develop the current Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) processes currently ongoing in ICCAT (bluefin tuna, northern albacore, northern swordfish and Atlantic tropical tuna); ii) develop biological studies (reproduction, age and growth and genetics) on Atlantic and Mediterranean swordfish; iii) further develop the swordfish distribution model to the longline simulator study. Finally, funds have also been made available for filling knowledge gaps on the reproduction of Northern Atlantic Albacore and further investigate this species horizontal and vertical distribution.

OTHER NEWS

The ICCAT/Japan Capacity-Building Assistance Project (JCAP-2) has continued to fund the Restructuring and Recovery of the Statistical System in Liberia. In addition to this a capacity building course was scheduled in Gabon to further enhance the local capacity of fishery observers' onboard purse-seine vessels but has been postponed due to the travel restriction imposed by the pandemic. For the same reason, an enhance scientific capacity building initiative, through a long-term training in an EU research laboratory by a young scientist from Uruguay, was postponed *sine die*.

The Commission created two virtual working groups during the 2019 Annual meeting: Virtual Working Group on the Review of the Rules of Procedure of the Commission (VWG-RRP) and Virtual Working Group on Sustainable Financial Position for ICCAT (VWG-SF). These Virtual Working groups have met and proposals will be provided for consideration during the 2020 Commission process.

2020 Calendar for remaining events

November

- Swordfish MSE Technical Group Meeting (25-26 November, Online)



Mr. Javier Martínez has joined the Compliance department as Full Stack Developer (eBCD). The Secretariat would like to wish him a warm welcome.

Dr Lisa Ailloud left the Secretariat in July to take up a position with NOAA (USA). Through this Newsletter, her colleagues at the Secretariat would like to wish Lisa every success in this new stage of her life.