



ICCAT NEWSLETTER

No. 37, September 2023

Note from the ICCAT Executive Secretary

Dear friends of the tuna world,

We are delighted to see you again and thank you for your continued support in our shared commitment to finding solutions to the challenges of conserving and managing tuna and tuna-like species.

Thanks to this impetus, and despite an unprecedentedly busy schedule of meetings during this intersessional period, we have been able to make progress on a number of issues such as catch documentation, on-board working standards, MCS, management strategies, and electronic monitoring, among others. In addition, the first Climate Change Expert Meeting was held in order to better address this major issue. We have also continued to pay particular attention to cooperation, for example by signing an agreement with the FAO-ABNJ2 Programme. Our achievements continue to be consolidated through the work of the Commission's various bodies.

In this regard, the ICCAT Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS) is preparing to hold its annual Plenary session from 25 to 29 September 2023 in Madrid to provide advice to the Commission. In addition, Egypt, the land of the Pharaohs, has kindly invited the Commission to hold its annual session here this year in hybrid format ([Triumph Al Katameya Hotel and Conference Center](#), New Cairo, Egypt, 13 to 20 November 2023), which will be preceded by the hybrid intersessional meeting of the Compliance Committee (11 and 12 November 2023).

These bodies will give careful consideration to the new global context marked by the recent adoption of global instruments (the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, the Kunming-Montréal Global Biodiversity Framework and the BBNJ Treaty). These instruments offer an opportunity to strengthen collaboration in the face of the new challenges that they present, but which we will undoubtedly meet.

See you soon in Madrid (Spain) and/or New Cairo (Egypt)!

Happy reading!

Camille Jean Pierre Manel

ICCAT PARTICIPATION AND/OR ORGANIZATION TO WORKSHOPS, SEMINARS AND COURSES

The ICCAT Secretariat has organized and participated in the following:

- **ICCAT Workshop on Bluefin tuna close-kin Mark-Recapture (CKMR)** (*Hybrid, Madrid, Spain, 14-16 March 2023*)
- **Regional Observer Programme for eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean Bluefin Tuna – Training of trainers** (*Oliva, Valencia, Spain, 3-5 April 2023*)
- **FAO/PSMA Secretariat – First Meeting of the PSMA Strategy *ad hoc* and Fourth Meeting of the Part 6 Working Group** (*Hybrid/Rome, Italy, 3-7 April and 4 April 2023*)
- **European Tracking Network EU COST action final symposium and first workshop of the Strategic Infrastructure for improved animal Tracking in European Seas (STRAITS) EU HORIZON Project** (*Izmir, Türkiye, 1-3 May 2023*)
- **ICCAT Workshop on Data Limited Assessment Methods for Small Tunas** (*Madrid, Spain, 9-12 May 2023*)
- **MRAG-COFREPÊCHE Observer Training Course** (*Valencia, Spain, 15-19 May 2023*)
- **ICCAT Ambassadors Webinars on Northern Atlantic Swordfish MSE (N-SWO MSE)** (*Online, 12 June 2023*)
- **ICCAT Workshop for the improvement of statistical data collection and reporting on small scale (artisanal) fisheries in West Africa** (*Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, 12-16 June 2023*)
- **ICCAT Capacity Building Workshops on Tropical Tunas Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE)** (*Online, 13 June 2023*)
- **GFCM/ICCAT Collaboration – Inspection training for Israel** (*Tel Aviv, Israel, 26-29 June 2023*)
- **ICCAT GBYP Workshop on Atlantic Bluefin Tuna Electronic Tagging** (*Hybrid/Madrid, Spain, 4-6 July 2023*)
- **ICCAT Workshop on the Shark Research and Data Collection Programme (SRDCP)** (*Hybrid/Madrid, Spain, 13-15 July 2023*)
- **ICCAT Seminar on high seas boarding schemes in the ICCAT context** (*Vigo, Spain, 13-14 September 2023*)

RECENT MEETINGS THAT HAVE TAKEN PLACE

2023 Commission meetings

- First Intersessional Meeting of Panel 4 on North Atlantic Swordfish MSE (*Online, 6 March 2023*)
- Intersessional Meeting of Panel 2 (*Hybrid, Madrid (Spain), 7-10 March 2023*)
- First Intersessional meeting of Panel 1 (*Hybrid, Lisboa (Portugal), 27-31 March 2023*)
- Second Intersessional meeting of Panel 1 on Western Skipjack MSE (*Online, 5 May 2023*)
- Meeting of the Port Inspection Expert Group for Capacity Building and Assistance (PIEG) (*Online, 30 May 2023*)
- Meeting of the *ad hoc* Working Group on Labor Standards (LSWG) (*Online, 31 May 2023*)
- Second Meeting of the eBCD Technical Working Group (eBCD TWG) (*Hybrid/Osaka (Japan), 5 June 2023*)
- Meeting of the *Ad Hoc* Working Group on Catch Documentation Scheme (CDS) (*Hybrid/Osaka (Japan), 6 June 2023*)
- 16th Meeting of the Working Group on Integrated Monitoring Measures (IMM) (*Hybrid/Osaka (Japan), 7-9 June 2023*)
- Third Intersessional Meeting of Panel 1 (*Hybrid/Madrid, Spain, 20-22 June 2023*)
- Second Intersessional meeting of Panel 4 on North Atlantic Swordfish MSE (*Online, 30 June 2023*)
- Climate Change Expert meeting (*Online, 11-12 July 2023*)
- Second Meeting of the Electronic Monitoring Systems (EMS) Working Group (*Online, 7 September 2023*)

2023 SCRS meetings

- Intersessional Meeting of the Tropical Tunas Species Group (including MSE) (*Hybrid/Madrid (Spain), 27 February-3 March 2023*)
- North Atlantic Albacore Data Preparatory Meeting (incl. MSE) (*Hybrid/San Sebastian, Pasaia (Spain) (20-23 March 2023)*)
- Blue Shark Data Preparatory Meeting (*Hybrid/Olhão (Portugal), 17-21 April 2023*)
- Intersessional Meeting of the Subcommittee on Ecosystems and Bycatch (*Hybrid/Madrid (Spain), 8-12 May 2023*)
- Intersessional Meeting of the Small Tunas Species Group (*Hybrid, Madrid (Spain), 15-18 May 2023*)
- Meeting of the Working Group on Stock Assessment Methods (WGSAM) (*Hybrid, Madrid (Spain), 15-18 May 2023*)
- Intersessional Meeting of the Swordfish Species Group (including MSE) (*Hybrid/Saint Andrews, New Brunswick (Canada), 22-26 May 2023*)
- Sailfish Data Preparatory and Stock Assessment Meeting (*Hybrid/Dakar (Senegal), 5-10 June 2023*)
- Atlantic Albacore Stock Assessment meeting (incl. MSE) (*Hybrid/Madrid (Spain), 26-29 June 2023*)
- Blue Shark Stock Assessment meeting (*Hybrid/Madrid (Spain), 17-21 July 2023*)
- Second Intersessional Meeting of the North Atlantic Swordfish Technical Sub-group on MSE (*Online, 4-5 September 2023*)
- SCRS Species Group meetings (*Hybrid/Madrid (Spain), 18-22 September 2023*)

2023 Calendar for remaining events

- Meeting of the Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS) (*Hybrid/Madrid (Spain), 25-29 September 2023*)
- Third Intersessional meeting of Panel 4 on North Atlantic Swordfish MSE (*Online, 10-11 October 2023*)
- Online training workshop session on using ICCAT's Integrated Online Management System (IOMS) (*Online, 16 October 2023*)
- Meeting of the Compliance Committee (*Hybrid/New Cairo (Egypt), 11-12 November 2023*)
- 28th Regular Meeting of the Commission (*Hybrid/New Cairo (Egypt), 13-20 November 2023*)

Additional information on these meetings is available on the ICCAT website.

ICCAT Data Collection and Research programmes

The ***Atlantic-wide Research Programme on Bluefin Tuna (GBYP)*** has continued to carry out the activities planned for Phase 12, which was extended for 4 months, until 23 July 2023. As such it was possible to hold some workshops that had been postponed due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and to complete a pilot study on bluefin tuna epigenetic ageing. Phase 13 started on 1st May 2023 with an initial duration of 12 months. The most relevant research activities to be carried out include: data management (support to development of new ICCAT DBs on electronic tags and biological data); improvement of fishery independent indices (development of a new aerial survey in Central and Western Mediterranean in 2023, updating the aerial survey index until 2022, and development of an improved aerial survey index time series following a model based approach that takes into consideration environmental variables affecting spawners distribution); support to national conventional and electronic tagging programmes (including deployment of 75 electronic tags within the framework of CPCs e-tagging programmes); biological sampling and analyses to update and improve the parameters used for stock assessment and, finally, support to modelling tasks, focusing on the implementation of MSE BFT process. Additional information can be found [here](#).

The ***Albacore Year Programme (ALBYP)*** continued its activities during the past months, focusing on the reproductive study of Northern and Southern Atlantic Albacore and e-tagging aiming enhance knowledge of albacore movements and habitat use. For the North Atlantic a total of 272 gonads and 163 spines have been collected and processed from Venezuelan and Chinese Taipei longliners, to study reproduction, assign age and interpret maturity data. Collection of albacore gonads continues in this area and a comprehensive summary of the compiled results will be presented during the September 2023 SCRS meeting. For the Southern Atlantic so far gonads were collected by the Brazilian (134 gonads) and the Chinese Taipei tuna fleets (180 gonads). About 167 gonads have been histologically processed and analyzed to estimate L_{50} . Initial results suggest that the spawning area in the South Atlantic is probably located between latitudes 10°S and 25°S, and that both male and female size at maturity are larger than previously assumed, however these results should be seen as preliminary, since the sample size and geographic range were limited.

The ***Small Tunas Year Programme (SMTYP)*** continued collecting biological samples aimed at growth, maturity and stock structure studies on small tunas species (little tunny, LTA, *Euthynnus alletteratus*; Atlantic bonito, BON, *Sarda sarda*; and wahoo, WAH, *Acanthocybium solandri*). In 2023 a new consortium was set up involving 13 entities from 10 CPCs, and a new contract was signed. The objective of the latter contract is to collect biological samples to: i) fill specific size gaps for estimating the growth and maturity parameters for BON, LTA and WAH; ii) expand stock structure studies for frigate tuna (FRI) and bullet tuna (BLT) in the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea; iii) determine the growth and reproduction parameters for BON, LTA, and WAH; iv) refine the stock structure analysis for WAH, BON, and LTA and determinate the stock structure for FRI and BLT; and, finally v) investigate genetic species differentiation between FRI and BLT. A number of documents and presentations were provided during 2023 meeting of the Small Tunas Species Group, which presented results of the research conducted in the previous years within SMTYP. In addition, priorities were identified to be taken into account in terms of the species and areas to be sampled under the SMTYP biological collection contract in late 2023 and throughout 2024.

The ***Enhanced Programme for Billfish Research (EPBR)*** evaluates adult habitat use and migration in the Eastern Atlantic through e-tagging, studying growth in the Eastern Atlantic, blue marlin reproduction in the Gulf of Mexico and collecting samples for population genetic analysis as its current objectives. A new contract was signed in July 2023 to resume EPBR after the difficulties during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2022) and allow project activities to be carried out until the end of this year, including the collection of additional samples from the three major billfish species in the North-eastern Atlantic (*Makaira nigricans*, BUM; *Kajikia albida*, WHM; and *Istiophorus albicans*, SAI). Despite the difficulties in collecting samples from industrial fleets, 14 new samples were collected from artisanal fisheries in Senegal over the past couple of months. Overall, a total of 525 samples have now been collected from those three species. A joint workshop on age reading was held in IPMA (13-18 February, Olhão, Portugal). The major objectives were to enhance expertise among ICCAT scientists for these species by: i) sharing knowledge between experts; ii) standardize methodologies; and iii) review work already completed and progress plans for next steps in Swordfish, Billfishes & Small tunas research programs regarding ageing. A study on blue marlin reproduction in the Gulf of Mexico is expected to start in late 2023 or early 2024, where satellite tagging of blue and white marlin has started off the southern coast of Portugal.

The **Shark Research and Data Collection Programme (SRDCP)** continued its activities during the past months. The study on the age and growth of the South Atlantic shortfin mako continued. All samples provided by Japan, Namibia, and Brazil have been processed, the vertebrae have been digitalized and uploaded into an age reading platform. The age readings are being carried out and preliminary growth curves shall be made available for the 2024 stock assessment. The study on genetic analysis of porbeagle in the Atlantic Ocean is progressing and new results will be presented during the September 2023 Shark Species Group meeting. A total of 43 tags deployed on shortfin mako in the Northwest, Northeast, tropical Northeast and equatorial region, and Southwest Atlantic to study migration and the post-release mortality. Sharks tagged in the Northwest and Central Atlantic demonstrated low to no apparent residency patterns. In contrast, sharks tagged in the Northeast and Southwest Atlantic showed evidence of site fidelity; these sites were identified as possible key areas for shortfin mako. E-tagging of porbeagle continued with three new tags being deployed by Norway, with one shark showing a long migration (~5,000km) from cold northern Atlantic waters in the summer to warmer waters of the NE Atlantic in the winter. A total of 27 miniPATs have been deployed by EU-Portugal, the United States and Uruguay on silky (21), oceanic whitetip (8), smooth hammerhead (3) and scalloped hammerhead (1) sharks, which were deemed by the SCRS to be priority species.

The **Swordfish Year Programme (SWOYP)** continued its activities during the past months, focusing on three main research areas - ageing and growth, reproductive biology, and genetics - are each led by study coordinators who oversee work involving 21 institutions from 14 ICCAT CPCs/Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties. In 2023, SWOYP focused on processing and analysis of a backlog of samples obtained in earlier project phases. This led to significant project milestones: i) age readers and external experts refined swordfish ageing protocols and made significant progress on an age reading calibration exercise; ii) age validation exercise was initiated, based on bomb radiocarbon analysis applied to 30 samples collected, with preliminary results indicating that there has been age overcounting for early growth rings and that otolith mass is poor predictor for age; 289 gonad samples were processed and prepared for histological analysis, which is an important step in refining maturity ogives; additional samples are being requested from hypothesized spawning areas in the Sargasso Sea and Gulf of Guinea, which is important for genetic differentiation of stocks, understanding stock spawning period, and better estimating fecundity and recruitment. To date, a total of 26 miniPAT tags have been deployed in the North (13) and South Atlantic (9) and the Mediterranean Sea (4), with results indicating considerable horizontal movements and patterns of vertical movement through depth and temperature layers. These findings are important for improvements to the swordfish species distribution model which the Swordfish Species Group uses to better understand SWO catch rates.

Tropical Tunas: Since the closure of the Atlantic Ocean Tropical Tuna Tagging Program in 2021, research on tropical tunas has continued in four main areas: tag recovery, tag seeding experiments, aging studies, and tagging in the northwestern Atlantic. As of September 2023, a total of 264 tags have been deployed along the eastern coast of the United States on bigeye tuna (23), yellowfin tuna (226) and skipjack (11) and unknown (4), which corresponds of about 18% of the overall target (1,400). Two new short-term contracts were issued to Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire for tag seeding experiments, awareness raising activities, and processing tag recaptures. These contracts have recovered a total of 12 tags over the past year. Their efforts also resulted in collection and analysis of a number of otoliths and spines for aging studies.

Within the current ICCAT Data Collection and Research Programmes there are currently 24 short-term contracts ongoing, of which five are related to GBYP.

Other activities

ICCAT/Japan Capacity-Building Assistance Project (JCAP) - Phase 2: JCAP-2 began in 2019 with the major objective of assisting developing Contracting Parties and Cooperating non-Contracting Parties, Entities or Fishing Entities (CPCs) to improve their capacities in data collection, reporting and effective implementation of ICCAT measures. New proposals are being evaluated. The selected applications will be funded during the last year of this capacity building assistance project (December 2023 – November 2024).

In 2023 the ICCAT Secretariat has received the following **voluntary contributions**:

- In January 2023, Chinese Taipei made a voluntary financial contribution to ICCAT for fiscal year 2023. This voluntary contribution amount to €111,000 in total, with €100,000 for the Commission, €3,000 for IOMS, €3,000 for GBYP and €3,000 for SRDCP and €2,000 for EBRP.
- The United States provided its support to cover the costs of the Enhanced Programme for Billfish Research Data Fund, partially the costs of the Workshop of Western Africa Statistical Correspondents on Billfish data collection and reporting initially scheduled to Dakar but finally held in Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire), and the 1st Tropical Tunas Workshop on MSE for scientist (€193,679.00).
- The ICCAT Secretariat recently signed five new grant agreements with the European Union. These voluntary contributions include the following:
 - *Strengthening the scientific basis on tuna and tuna-like species for decision-making in ICCAT* - €810,525;
 - *Atlantic-Wide Research Programme for the Bluefin Tuna, Phase 13* - €900,000;
 - *Vessel Manager Module of the Integrated Online Management System (IOMS)* - €100,000;
 - *Integration of the UN/FLUX standard into the Integrated Online Management System (IOMS)* - €150,000;
 - *ICCAT - contribution to the organisation of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) intersessional meetings and other Working Groups in the second half of 2023 and 2024* - €312,500.

Due to the remaining impact of the pandemic on the ICCAT activities over the past years, the following contracts with the European Union were extended throughout 2023:

- In January 2023, a 9-month extension until 17 December 2023 was agreed to the EU grant agreement EMFAF-2021-VC-ICCAT5-IBA-02 *Strengthening the scientific basis on tuna and tuna-like species for decision-making in ICCAT*. This voluntary contribution from the European Union amounts to €450,000 (contract amount: €701,385).
- In February 2023, a 4-month extension until 30 July 2023 was requested to the EU grant agreement EMFAF-2021-VC-ICCAT5-IBA *ICCAT- Atlantic-Wide Research Programme for the Bluefin Tuna Phase 12*. The voluntary contribution from the European Union amounts to €1,200,000, whereas the remaining €300,000 are provided voluntarily by other ICCAT Contracting Parties which have a bluefin tuna quota.

OTHER NEWS

28TH REGULAR MEETING OF THE COMMISSION

The International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) meet in New Cairo (Egypt) at the 28th Regular Meeting of the Commission to take important decisions on the conservation and management of ICCAT fisheries.

PUBLICATIONS

Volume 3 of the Report for the biennial period 2022-23, Part I (2022), corresponding to the 2022 Annual Reports have been published. Please access the report [here](#).

To date first eight issues of **Volume 80** of the *ICCAT Collective Volume of Scientific Papers*, include 83 scientific papers and reports presented to the SCRS during 2023, have been published [here](#).

STAFF



*The former Head of Administration and Finance, **Mr. Juan Antonio Moreno** retired after 48 years of service at the ICCAT Secretariat.*

Through this Newsletter, his colleagues from the ICCAT Secretariat wish him every success in this new stage of his life.



***Ms. María Bonacasa** joined as Head of the Department of Administration and Finance in July 2023.*



***Ms. Ingrid Ferrer** joined the Department of Administration and Finance as Administrative Assistant in July 2023.*

The ICCAT Secretariat would like to wish Ms. Bonacasa and Ms Ferrer a warm welcome and great success in their new career as staff member of ICCAT.