



## ICCAT NEWSLETTER

### No. 38

February 2024

Executive Secretary

Dear Readers and Tuna World Friends,

In these early months of the year, I would like to thank you again for your invaluable contribution during 2023, a year in which we were again able to make significant progress towards achieving the Commission's objectives. I wish you all the best for 2024!

Despite an extraordinary context marked by the crisis in the Middle East, which affected physical participation, the Commission held its 28th Regular Meeting in a hybrid format in New Cairo. The very warm welcome we received in this beautiful capital of Egypt enabled us to exchange views and agree on essential management measures, as is customary.

Thus, following the conclusion of their intersessional work, the Commission's various subsidiary bodies were able to successfully conclude their work which allowed the Commission to adopt 19 new Recommendations, 4 Resolutions and two documents of reference. The documents adopted were, among others: cetaceans, whale sharks and mobulid rays, Atlantic Blue Shark, North Albacore, minimum standards and programme requirements for Electronic Monitoring Systems (EMS), planning of a management procedure for northern Atlantic Swordfish, Climate Change, and principles on labour standards and implementation of biodiversity conservation instruments. However, notwithstanding the immense efforts of the CPCs, the intense discussions on Tropical tunas could not reach an agreement despite a consensus that seemed close at hand.

Despite the heavy work programme for 2024, the Secretariat is firmly committed to working alongside the CPCs and partners to ensure a successful intersessional period. The Secretariat wishes you all a prosperous 2024 as we continue to face the challenges together!

Happy reading of this 38th issue of the ICCAT Newsletter!

## INTRODUCTION

During the **28th Regular Meeting of the Commission** that was held in New Cairo (Egypt), significant progress was made, and a number of relevant decisions were taken, including:

ICCAT adopted **3 new protection measures for cetaceans, whale sharks and mobulid rays** caught in the Convention area in association with ICCAT fisheries, which prohibit these species being retained on board, transhipped, or landed, in whole or in part.

### **North Atlantic Albacore**

TAC - 47,251 t (2024 to 2026) (recent increase in abundance)

### **North and South Atlantic Blue Shark**

TAC - 32,689 t for North and 27,711 t for South stock, which corresponds to reductions 16.4% and 4.2%, respectively.



### North Atlantic Swordfish

Final CMP shall be reviewed at 2024 Annual Meeting and one shall be selected for adoption/application to establish the TAC for 2025-2027 and future years.

### Tropical Tunas

Simple rollover of the current multi-annual conservation and management programme:

**Bigeye tuna** (62,000 t for 2024), **Yellowfin** (110,000 t), Juvenile bigeye and yellowfin tuna (72-day fishing closure and limitation on the use of FADs in 2024 maintained).

ICCAT also adopted Recommendations establishing minimum standards and programme requirements for the use of **Electronic Monitoring Systems** in ICCAT fisheries and a Resolution on core principles on **Labour Standards** in ICCAT fisheries.

ICCAT's existing **port inspection** and **IUU vessel listing measures** were strengthened and a **Standing Working Group on Catch Document Schemes (CDS)** was established.



Image: New Cairo, Egypt

A more comprehensive approach was agreed by the Compliance Committee to encourage the use of **capacity building** as a tool to improve compliance in ICCAT.

ICCAT reiterated its commitment to sustainable exploitation of tuna resources and to conservation of marine biodiversity.



### RECOMMENDATIONS, RESOLUTIONS AND REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

During the 28th Regular Meeting of the Commission, which was held in hybrid format (13-20 Nov 2023), that was attended by *circa* 300 in-person delegates and 350 more online, from 47 Contracting Parties, 5 Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties, 6 intergovernmental organizations, 26 Non-Governmental Organizations and 1 Non-Contracting Party, ICCAT adopted **19 Recommendation, 4 Resolutions and 2 Documents of reference:**

#### [Rec. 23-01](#)

*Recommendation by ICCAT extending and amending Recommendation 22-01 on a Multi-annual Conservation and Management Programme for tropical tunas*

#### [Rec. 23-02](#)

*Recommendation by ICCAT on Brazil's bigeye tuna payback plan*



**Rec. 23-03**

*Recommendation by ICCAT on Senegal's bigeye tuna payback plan*

**Rec. 23-04**

*Recommendation by ICCAT replacing Recommendation 22-03 extending and amending Recommendation 17-02 for the conservation of North Atlantic swordfish*

**Rec. 23-05**

*Recommendation by ICCAT amending the Recommendation 21-04 on conservation and management measures, including a management procedure and exceptional circumstances protocol, for North Atlantic albacore*

**Rec. 23-06**

*Recommendation by ICCAT amending the Recommendation 22-08 establishing a Multi-annual Management Plan for bluefin tuna in the eastern Atlantic and the Mediterranean*

**Rec. 23-07**

*Recommendation by ICCAT amending the Recommendation 22-09 establishing a management procedure for Atlantic bluefin tuna to be used for both the western Atlantic and eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean management areas*

**Rec. 23-08**

*Recommendation by ICCAT for a pilot project for farming bluefin tuna (*Thunnus thynnus*) in the Cantabrian Sea*

**Rec. 23-09**

*Recommendation by ICCAT on Curaçao's blue marlin payback plan*

**Rec. 23-10**

*Recommendation by ICCAT to replace Recommendation 19-07 on management measures for the conservation of North Atlantic blue shark caught in association with ICCAT fisheries*

**Rec. 23-11**

*Recommendation by ICCAT to replace Recommendation 19-08 on management measures for the conservation of the South Atlantic blue shark caught in association with ICCAT fisheries*

**Rec. 23-12**

*Recommendation by ICCAT for the conservation of whale sharks (*Rhincodon typus*) caught in association with ICCAT fisheries*

**Rec. 23-13**

*Supplemental Recommendation by ICCAT amending Recommendation 22-12 on the bycatch of sea turtles caught in association with ICCAT fisheries*

**Rec. 23-14**

*Recommendation by ICCAT on mobulid rays (family *Mobulidae*) caught in association with ICCAT fisheries*

**Res. 23-15**

*Resolution by ICCAT on cetaceans encirclement*

**Rec. 23-16**

*Recommendation by ICCAT amending Recommendation 21-13 on establishing a list of vessels presumed to have carried out illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing activities*



### **Rec. 23-17**

*Recommendation by ICCAT amending Recommendation 18-09 on Port State measures to prevent, deter, and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing*

### **Rec. 23-18**

*Recommendation by ICCAT to establish minimum standards and programme requirements for the use of Electronic Monitoring Systems (EMS) in ICCAT fisheries*

### **Res. 23-19**

*Resolution by ICCAT on next steps on the Joint Experts Group on Climate Change in 2024*

### **Res. 23-20**

*Resolution by ICCAT on core principles on labour standards in ICCAT fisheries*

### **Rec. 23-21**

*Recommendation by ICCAT amending and replacing Recommendation 18-13 on an ICCAT Bluefin Tuna Catch Documentation programme*

### **Rec. 23-22**

*Recommendation by ICCAT on establishment of a Standing Catch Document Scheme Working Group (CDS WG)*

### **Res. 23-23**

*Resolution by ICCAT on the implementation of biodiversity conservation instruments*

### **Ref. 23-24**

*Revised Guidelines for the Preparation of Annual Reports*

### **Ref. 23-25**

*Rules of procedure for the administration of the special Meeting Participation Fund*

## **PAST SCIENTIFIC STOCK ASSESSMENTS**

**In 2023 four stocks were assessed: North Atlantic albacore, Atlantic sailfish, North and South Atlantic Blue shark.**

### **Other meetings**

Several meetings of the SWO-N Technical Sub-group on MSE and of TRO Tunas Species Group (including MSE), as well as two Intersessional Meetings of PA1 on MSE and another three of PA4 on North Atlantic Swordfish MSE that involved a high number of SCRS delegates.

## **PAST MEETINGS & WORKSHOPS**

Since the last Newsletter, the following Commission and SCRS meetings and Workshops were held:

### **COMMISSION AND SCRS MEETINGS**

- SCRS Plenary Meeting (Hybrid/Madrid (Spain), 25-29 Sept 2023)
- Third Intersessional Meeting of PA4 on North Atlantic Swordfish MSE (Online, 10-11 Oct)
- Fourth Intersessional Meeting of PA1 (Online, 23 Oct)
- Meeting of the Compliance Committee (Hybrid/New Cairo (Egypt), 11-12 Nov)
- 28<sup>th</sup> Regular Meeting of the Commission (Hybrid/New Cairo (Egypt), 13-20 Nov)

## SEMINARS & WORKSHOPS

- Seminar on HSBS in the ICCAT Context (In-person, Vigo, Spain, 13-14 Sept)
- Workshop to continue the evaluation of ICCAT fisheries impact on marine turtles in the Mediterranean Sea (Malaga, Spain, 2-6 Oct)
- 2nd Ambassadors Webinar on N-SWO MSE (Online, 5 Oct)
- 2nd Tropical Tunas Workshop on MSE (for managers) (Online, 13 Oct)
- Online training workshop session on using ICCAT's IOMS (Online, 16 Oct)
- WG-ORT Meeting (Online, 7-8 Feb)

## PAST EXTERNAL MEETINGS

Between October 2023 and February 2024, members of the Secretariat staff have participated actively in meetings and activities related to ICCAT:

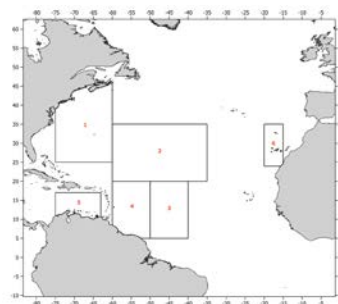
- 19th Session of the WECAFC (Hybrid/Bridgetown, Barbados, 6-8 Sept).
- ICES Annual Science Conference (Bilbao, Spain, 11-15 Sept)
- 2023 ASFA Advisory Board Meeting (Bangkok, Thailand, 3-6 Oct)
- MEDAC Meetings of the Working Group (WG2) on Pelagic Fisheries and the Focus Group (FG) on the Adriatic Sea (Rome, Italy, 12 Oct)

## OTHER SCIENTIFIC ACTIVITIES

The **GBYP** successfully completed Phase 12, presenting results to the 2023 BFT Species Group and SCRS Plenary Meeting. Phase 13, ongoing since May 2023, focuses on genetic studies for a CKMR study for the BFT eastern stock. Aerial surveys and e-tagging campaigns were conducted in the Western and Central Mediterranean. The development of ICCAT DBs on electronic tags and biological data is in progress. The proposal for Phase 14, spanning two years, was submitted with a 30% decrease in funds compared to the previous Phase. Efforts are underway to enhance cost-effectiveness and maintain support to the SCRS workplan.



The **ALBYP** has prioritized research on the following topics: **Reproductive biology study** to improve knowledge on maturity and fecundity for both north and south Atlantic stocks, an electronic tagging study to better understand the life cycle and habitat use, and MSE to follow the MSE schedule agreed by the Commission. Preliminary results suggest different maturity schedules for both stocks. For this reason, it is intended to continue these studies in order to verify, or reject, whether these important biological parameters vary between the two Atlantic stocks.



*Sampling areas defined for the reproductive study of albacore in North Atlantic*

- **Tagging** activities have started in the north Atlantic, where 37 tracks are already available with more than 4000 days observed, through both pop-ups and internal archival tags, revealing the year round migration patterns and fidelity to the Bay of Biscay feeding area. Tagging activities will continue throughout the years 2024-2025 on both the north and the south Atlantic. The intention in the south Atlantic is to tag albacore in the Southeast and Northeast regions of Brazil, and South Africa.



Deploying archival tags

- **North Atlantic Albacore MSE** - In 2024 a new set of Reference and Robustness Operating Models will be conditioned using the stock assessment reference case developed in 2023. Another key development expected for this MSE is the development of the observation error model to project abundance indices considering the statistical properties of the indices. In 2024 and 2025, empirical and model-based MPs will be developed and evaluated. At least one of the MPs considered should be the one adopted in [Rec. 21-04](#).

The **SMTYP** continued collecting biological samples aimed at growth, maturity and stock structure studies on small tunas species, specifically Little tunny (LTA), Atlantic bonito (BON) and Wahoo (WAH). These involve a consortium of 13 institutions (10 CPCs), that continued 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 *determine the stock structure analysis* for FRI and BLT; and, v) *investigate genetic species differentiation* between FRI and BLT.

Other research activities planned for 2024 include: updating the biological meta-database, estimation of length-weight relationships representative at the stocks/regional level, calibration and adopting internationally agreed maturity scales and, further develop capacity building on the use of data limited methods for the provision of management advice for these stocks.

Within the **SRDCP** *age readings of new vertebrae samples of shortfin mako* have been taking place, and preliminary growth curves are expected for this year. Approaches to overcome the lack of samples from small and/or large size specimens will be explored through growth modelling once the age readings are complete. *Genetic analysis of porbeagle* based on mitogenomic analysis is ongoing. Thus far, results of phylogenetic tree reconstruction clearly showed the existence of two distinct clades, North and South Atlantic. No genetic differentiation between East and West regions in the North Atlantic Ocean was observed. Next steps will include the incorporation to the analysis of new samples from the southwestern Atlantic in order to improve the spatial coverage of the study. *Electronic tagging* continued for shortfin mako, longfin mako, porbeagle, silky, oceanic whitetip, smooth hammerhead, and scalloped hammerhead sharks.

Established in 2018, the **SWOYP** has included 27 partner groups from 17 ICCAT CPCs to collect samples from nearly 5000 fish. The programme focuses on four main areas, which support assessment for swordfish in the North and South Atlantic and Mediterranean:

- On *ageing and growth*, the programme recently made significant advancements in validation of age readings through bomb radiocarbon analysis. This will contribute to a new growth models for each of the three stocks.
- Work on *reproduction* has led to advancements on identifying maturity stages and refinements to estimates of age at maturity.



- A *genetics study* demonstrated that there is considerable differentiation between the Mediterranean and Atlantic stocks, with a lesser degree of differentiation observed between the North and the South Atlantic. The analysis also indicated the location zones of mixing between the different stocks.
- Noting recent shifts in catch rates in more northern regions, the *stock movement studies* in combination with habitat suitability models developed by the group will support assessments that better account for climate change effects on the stock. New results from the *tagging program* show that swordfish travel considerable distances in the North and South Atlantic and that they spend most of the day in deeper/colder waters, but rise to the surface during the night.
- The *Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) process* for the North Atlantic stock is scheduled to provide final results to the Commission by the end of 2024.

Current objectives of the **EPBR** include evaluating adult habitat use, studying spawning patterns and collecting samples for population growth and genetic analysis. Local restrictions in response to the Covid-19 pandemic have continued to affect sample collection efforts through 2023. Despite these challenges, 66 additional samples were collected from artisanal fisheries by Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire. This included samples from the three major billfish species (BUM, WHM and SAI). These data will support efforts to improve billfish stock assessment. Preliminary estimates of longevity obtained from otoliths collected prior to 2022 were presented during the Billfish Species Group meeting. Accurate estimates of age and growth are crucial for age-based structured stock assessments. In 2023, 68 additional otoliths were sent to FAS by IPMA,

CRODT and NOAA (49 BUM, 16 SAI and 2 WHM). The Species Group also updated the recommended methodology for otolith collection for future sampling efforts. Collection of biological samples will continue in 2024. A study on blue marlin reproduction in the Gulf of Mexico shall start in 2024. As the blue and white marlin satellite tag deployment is not possible during 2023, it shall start in 2024.

## PUBLICATIONS

The 2023 SCRS Report has been published. Please access the report [here](#).

Vol. 80 of the ICCAT Collective Volume of Scientific Papers, containing 10 issues, includes 113 scientific papers and reports presented to the SCRS during 2023, have been published [here](#).

## 2024 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

The following events are scheduled to be held in 2024:

### COMMISSION MEETINGS

#### February

- 1st Intersessional Meeting of PA1 on SKJ-W MSE (Online, 20-21 Feb)
- Meeting of the PIEG (Online, 22 Feb)

#### March

- 1st Meeting of the Standing CDS WG (Hybrid, Madrid (Spain), 4 Mar)
- Intersessional Meeting of PA2 (Hybrid, Madrid (Spain), 5-8 Mar)

#### May

- 1st Virtual WG on Sustainable Financing Meeting (Online, 10 May)
- 2nd Intersessional Meeting of PA1 (Hybrid, Natal (Brazil), 22-24 May)



### **June**

- 1st Virtual WG on the review of the Rules of Procedure of the Commission Meeting (Online, TBC - 4 Jun)
- EMS WG Meeting (Hybrid, TBD - 10 Jun)
- 2nd Meeting of the Standing CDS WG (Hybrid, TBD - 11 Jun)
- 17th Meeting of the IMM WG (Hybrid, TBD - 12-14 Jun)

### **July**

- 2nd Virtual WG on Sustainable Financing Meeting (Online, TBD - 15 Jul)

### **September**

- 2nd Virtual Working Group on the review of the Rules of Procedure of the Commission Meeting (Online, TBD, 10 Sept)

### **November**

- 3rd Intersessional meeting of PA1 (Hybrid, TBD (Cyprus), 9-10 Nov)
- 24th Special Meeting of the Commission (Hybrid, TBD (Cyprus), 11-18 Nov 4)

## **SCRS MEETINGS**

### **February**

- 1st Intersessional Meeting of PA1 on SKJ-W MSE (Online, 20-21 Feb)
- Workshop of the SWOYP (Hybrid/Madrid (Spain), 27-29 Feb)

### **March**

- BUM DP Meeting (Hybrid, Miami, Florida (US), 11-15 Mar4)
- SCRS Workshop (Hybrid, Madrid (Spain), 18-20 Mar)

### **April**

- YFT DP Meeting (Hybrid, Madrid (Spain), 8-12 Apr 2024)
- BFT SG Intersessional Meeting (Hybrid, Valetta (Malta), 15-18 Apr)
- Workshop on ECOREGIONS (Online, 24-26 Apr)

### **May**

- SWO SG Intersessional Meeting (including MSE) (Hybrid, Madrid (Spain), 6-9 May)
- ALB-M DP and SA Meeting (Hybrid, Madrid (Spain), 13-18 May)
- SC-ECO and Bycatch Intersessional Meeting (Hybrid, Madrid (Spain), 27-31 May)

### **June**

- WGSAM Meeting (Hybrid, Madrid (Spain), 3-6 Jun)
- BUM SA Meeting (Hybrid, Madrid (Spain), 17-21 Jun)

### **July**

- YFT SA Meeting (Hybrid, Madrid (Spain), 8-12 Jul)

### **September**

- SCRS SG Meeting (Hybrid, Madrid (Spain), 16-21 Sept)
- SCRS Meeting (Hybrid, Madrid (Spain), 23-27 Sept)





## COMMISSION AND SCRS

- PA4 Intersessional Meeting on ATL-N SWO MSE (Online, 25-26 Jun)
- Climate Change Expert Meeting (Online, 2-3 Jul)

## 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.

The J-CAP Steering Committee as decided to award a contract to continue the *Pilot study proposal for Automatic fish length estimation system for BFT in Moroccan Atlantic Farm*.

The Secretariat is currently refining with Contracting Parties three proposal, aiming the Steering Committee to take soon a decision on the following proposals:

- Provision of capacity building to two technicians from São Tomé e Príncipe, to improve fisheries data submission to ICCAT;
- Capacity building for onboard fisheries observers from Ghana, aiming to strengthen the capacity of tuna fisheries observers in Ghana with respect to sampling design, data collection, data analysis and presentation, monitoring, and reporting;
- Several capacity building initiatives to enhance capacity of Nigeria to actively participate in the ongoing ICCAT MSE processes.

Since the last Newsletter (September 2023) the ICCAT Secretariat has received the following **voluntary contributions**:

- In January 2024, Chinese Taipei made a voluntary financial contribution to ICCAT for fiscal year 2024. This voluntary contribution amount to €111,000 in total, which will also be applied to ICCAT activities concerned with the conservation and management of tuna and tuna-like species included in GBYP Phase 14 (€941.89).
- 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 in the Caribbean (West Atlantic) region for the improvement of statistical data collection and reporting on small scale (artisanal) fisheries (Panama City, Panama, 19-23 February 2024).
- Currently ICCAT has seven active grant agreements with the European Union. These voluntary contributions include the following:
  - *International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) - Capacity building* (€300,000)
  - *Pilot project on the implementation of Remote Electronic Monitoring on bluefin tuna processing vessels* (€164,604.80);
  - *Strengthening the scientific basis on tuna and tuna-like species for decision-making in ICCAT* (€648,420), recently extended until Dec 2024;
  - *Atlantic-Wide Research Programme for the Bluefin Tuna, Phase 13* (€900,000), recently extended until Jul 2024;
  - *Vessel Manager Module of the Integrated Online Management System (IOMS)* (€100,000);



- *Integration of the UN/FLUX standard into the IOMS (€150,000);*
- *ICCAT - contribution to the organisation of ICCAT intersessional meetings and other Working Groups in the second half of 2023 and 2024 (€250,000).*

In addition to these, the Secretariat has also submitted new proposals to the European Union, which are pending signature), to co-finance ICCAT activities throughout 2024 and 2025:

- *Strengthening the scientific basis on tuna and tuna-like species for decision-making in ICCAT.* This voluntary contribution from the European Union amounts to €800,000 (contract amount: €1,000,000).
- *Atlantic-Wide Research Programme for the Bluefin Tuna Phase 14.* The voluntary contribution from the European Union amounts to €800,000, whereas the remaining €900,000 are provided voluntarily by other ICCAT Contracting Parties which have a bluefin tuna quota, and the GBYP (balance) fund.
- *Contribution to the organisation of the 2024 ICCAT Annual Meeting (Cyprus).* The EU voluntary contribution amounts to €800,000 (contract amount: €1,000,000).

## OTHER NEWS

During the **28th Regular Special Meeting of the Commission**, it was agreed that the 24th Special Meeting of the Commission will be held in **EU-Cyprus** between **11 and 18 November 2024**. The Commission also agreed that the 3rd Intersessional Meeting of PA1 could also be held in EU-Cyprus from 9-10 November 2024 (TBC).

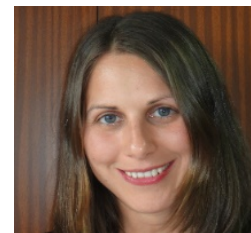
The ICCAT Secretariat would like to express its sincerest gratitude to all CPCs and its partners for their valuable contributions to the success of the meeting.



During the 28th Regular Meeting of the Commission, ICCAT expressed its gratitude to **Mr. Carlos Palma**, the former Head of the Department of Statistics and “ICCAT data guru”, who after more than 23 years of service to ICCAT retired in January 2024. Mr. Palma has significantly contributed to ICCAT’s scientific work, and the ICCAT community has benefited from his exceptional and dedicated service. The Secretariat sincerely thanks and congratulate Mr. Palma on his remarkable work and dedication, which will be greatly missed.



On 1 January 2024, **Mr. Carlos Mayor** became the new **Head of the Department of Statistics and Data Programmer**. The Secretariat would like to wish Mr. Mayor all the success in his new role.



**Mrs. Stasa Tensek**, who worked for many years as the GBYP Assistant Coordinator, on 1 January 2024 became the Officer for the ICCAT Research and Data Collection Programmes. The Secretariat would like to wish Mrs. Tensek all the success in her new role.



The SCRS expressed an emotional farewell towards **Ms. Victoria Ortíz de Zárate** at her last meeting in 2023. The Secretariat would like to wish Victoria every success in this new stage of her life.

For further news on ICCAT activities, please visit our website: [ICCAT·CICTA·CICAA](https://www.iccat.int)

Should you detect any errors or wish to provide any suggestions for improvement in this Newsletter, please inform us by e-mail ([info@iccat.int](mailto:info@iccat.int)).