
Recommendations to the 24th Regular Meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT)

10-17 November, 2015 in St. Julian's, Malta

The Ecology Action Centre (EAC) is pleased to be participating once again as a Canadian civil society observer to ICCAT. The EAC has worked proactively at Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) and the United Nations General Assembly for many years lending expertise in fisheries science and experience working with sustainable fishing industries. At ICCAT, we work to support sustainable fisheries and continued progress towards ecosystem-based and precautionary management measures.

The EAC calls on ICCAT parties to take the following actions at the 24th Regular meeting:

- Begin the development of management procedures for priority species, including Atlantic bluefin tuna, to ensure long-term sustainability of ICCAT stocks;
- Implement the electronic Bluefin Catch Document (eBCD) by the March 2016 deadline
- Reduce the total allowable catch (TAC) for bigeye tuna and put in place measures to reduce FAD-related mortality;
- Prohibit the retention of porbeagle sharks in the ICCAT convention area;
- Establish science-based catch limits for shortfin mako and blue sharks;
- Improve the existing finning ban by moving to a 'fins naturally attached' rule;
- Amend the ICCAT Convention text to include current best practices.

Begin the development of management procedures for priority species, including Atlantic bluefin tuna, to ensure long-term sustainability of ICCAT stocks

ICCAT has been saddled with unsustainable management practices that have led to overfished stocks, with many still rebuilding. Within the current management approach, these stocks risk future decline or failed recovery without additional rules in place. Furthermore, managers rely on science with a wide array of uncertainties, and the industry faces unpredictable fluctuations in quotas on a regular basis.

Establishing management procedures for priority species informed by Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) can offer particular advantages over the traditional approach to fisheries management. Under this approach, management objectives are determined at the outset, when the priority can be placed on objectives such as stability, abundance and yield. Scientists, managers and stakeholders work together throughout the process. Since managers can determine the parameters for sustainable fisheries first, rules can be put in place to monitor stock statuses and ensure that stocks will remain healthy or continue to rebuild. Management procedures can help to account for risk and allow for the balancing of trade-offs, enable managers to act swiftly and efficiently to ensure the health of the resource and long-term profitability, and effectively implement

best practices in modern fisheries management. Many RFMOs around the world have begun to use management procedures to address fisheries management challenges. ICCAT has the opportunity this year to agree to a path forward to develop these for stocks under its jurisdiction.

At the 2015 Commission meeting, to start the process of developing management procedures, the Commission should:

- **Agree to a timeline to adopt a management strategy for Atlantic bluefin tuna by 2017, which includes deadlines for defining target and limit reference points, as well as a suite of possible harvest control rules.**
 - **Set management objectives this year in Panel 2 as the critical first step;**
 - **Require that all Panels set at least a 75% probability of achieving the established target with only a 5% likelihood of breaching the limit;**
 - **Make clear that a fishery will be suspended and scientific monitoring instituted when limits are breached.**
- **Fully support the Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS) in developing an MSE tool including direct engagement with managers when necessary to ensure that the MSE can be used to inform harvest strategy development.**

Implement the electronic Bluefin Catch Document (eBCD) by the March 2016 deadline

The current paper-based system used by ICCAT to track catch is outdated and contains a number of loopholes for the trade of illegally-caught bluefin. ICCAT has developed the eBCD system to replace the paper-based system and to help combat the serious problem of illegal fishing, particularly within the eastern fishery. Unfortunately, the implementation of the eBCD has already been delayed multiple times, and there is ongoing discussion about whether to allow for future derogations from the BCD measure. While a few ICCAT Parties have already begun using the eBCD, to effectively reduce loopholes for illegal activity and to support the recovery of bluefin, it is critical that the eBCD be fully and comprehensively implemented by the 2016 purse seine fishing season.

- **We therefore urge the Commission to set a deadline of March 2016 for full eBCD implementation, including continuing to require validated eBCDs for trade including between Member States of the European Union.**

Reduce the total allowable catch (TAC) for bigeye tuna and put in place measures to reduce FAD-related mortality

A new assessment for bigeye tuna was conducted in 2015 and found the stock to be overfished with overfishing occurring. Managers should immediately put measures in place to end overfishing and rebuild the stock. Specifically, the SCRS recommends that the Commission "reduce the TAC to a level that would allow the recovery of the stock with high probability and in as short period as possible in accordance with the principles of Recommendation 11-13."

As such, Commission should reduce the TAC for bigeye tuna to 50,000 tonnes to allow for a greater than 60% chance of success of immediately ending overfishing. It is also important to prevent any rollover of underage and include minor harvesters within the allocation key to ensure that the stock can rebuild and to prevent future overfishing.

Another challenge to the recovery of Atlantic bigeye tuna is the prolific use of FADs in the Convention Area. The SCRS cautions the Commission that the increased bigeye harvest on FADs could have negative consequences for the productivity of bigeye tuna fisheries. **Therefore, the Commission should put in place a measure to reduce FAD-related mortality of small bigeye tunas.**

Prohibit the retention of porbeagle sharks in the ICCAT convention area

According to the SCRS, porbeagle sharks are one of the most vulnerable sharks in the ICCAT area; they have also been assessed as Endangered by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. In March 2013, porbeagle sharks were included in Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

In the North West Atlantic, current fishing mortality adds decades to the already slow recovery trajectory for this vulnerable shark, pushing it to upwards of 100 years. Estimates of dead discards, post release mortality or environmental changes over the possible century of recovery time are not accounted for, and there may be unregulated and unreported high seas catch not represented in abundance models.

We urge the Commission to prohibit the retention of porbeagle sharks in the ICCAT convention area to ensure the shortest recovery time for porbeagles and to help ensure that the CITES Appendix II listing can be implemented successfully.

Establish science-based catch limits for shortfin mako and blue sharks

The SCRS continues to recommend that fishing mortality should not increase for shortfin mako. Catch should be limited to historical catch averages that ensure mortality is below current levels until such a time as scientifically-based catch limits can be established. Specifically, the "Committee reiterates, as a precautionary approach, that catches of shortfin mako sharks should not be increased with respect to the 2006-2010 levels until more reliable stock assessment results are available for both the Northern and Southern stocks."

The SCRS Ecological Risk Assessment has also identified blue sharks as vulnerable and recommends measures to ensure catches stay within the Convention Objective. This year, the SCRS recommends that, "methods for mitigating shark by-catch by these fisheries also need to be investigated and applied." Further, the Committee recommends that recent catch levels (2009-2013) should not be increased for the South Atlantic stock of blue sharks. While the Committee could not reach a consensus on a specific management recommendation for the North Atlantic stock, the Commission needs to act with precaution to ensure sustainable harvest of blue shark is maintained before this shark becomes as depleted as other shark species in the Convention Area.

We urge the commission to establish precautionary catch limits for both shortfin mako and blue sharks, based on the SCRS recommendations so that recent catch levels are not increased.

Improve the existing finning ban by moving to a 'fins naturally attached' rule

ICCAT was the first RFMO to ban shark finning, but loopholes exist with the 5% rule, which mean illegal shark fins are still being landed. Requiring sharks to be landed with fins attached at the first point of landing is the most straightforward way of enforcing the finning ban and will greatly improve species-specific data collection for sharks. The North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC) has already adopted such a rule. At ICCAT, support for a fins naturally attached rule has been growing each year, with an increasing number of co-sponsors.

The EAC urges the Commission to support a proposed 'fins naturally attached' regulation this year to strengthen the safeguard for sharks.

Amend the ICCAT Convention text to include current best practices

The EAC applauds the efforts so far to modernize the ICCAT Convention text. As part of this process, we urge members to expand the list of species covered explicitly by the Convention. Specifically, all shark species listed in Article 64 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (Annex 1) should be officially managed by ICCAT.

In addition, the EAC urges the Commission to integrate the precautionary approach and ecosystem-based management, as outlined by the Food and Agriculture Organization Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement, when amending the Convention text. Furthermore, the amended Commission Convention should provide the Commission with the authority to make recommendations aimed at maintaining or restoring the abundance of ICCAT species above levels capable of producing maximum sustainable yield.

For more information, please contact:

Katie Schleit
Marine Campaign Coordinator
kschleit@ecologyaction.ca
+1-902-488-4078

Heather Grant
Marine Communications Campaigner
heatherg@ecologyaction.ca
+1-902-446-4840