



ISSF POSITION STATEMENT

Presented during the 24th Regular Meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas in St. Julian's, Malta 10-17 November 2015

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Tropical Tunas

The SCRS reassessed the status of Atlantic bigeye in 2015. Despite recent catch levels being below the TAC established on the basis of scientific advice from the previous assessment, the results of the new assessment are pessimistic and indicate that the stock is likely overfished and overfishing continues. ***ISSF urges the Commission to modify the catch limit for bigeye in Rec. [14-01] in a manner consistent with the rebuilding principles established in Rec. [11-13], as recommended by SCRS.***

Temperate Tunas

Serious data deficiencies for the Mediterranean albacore stock have been highlighted by the SCRS for several years, but have not been addressed by CPCs. The Mediterranean albacore stock is the only major commercial tuna stock in the world that remains to be assessed quantitatively. ***ISSF urges the CPCs identified by SCRS to review their historical data for Mediterranean albacore and submit revisions to SCRS.***

Sharks

The SCRS attempted to assess the status of blue shark stocks in 2015. However, there are considerable uncertainties in the results.

- ***As a precautionary measure, ISSF urges the Commission to limit blue shark catches to recent levels, in line with the SCRS advice for the South Atlantic stock. In addition, CPCs should make substantial efforts to improve the information basis to enable improved shark assessments.***
- ***Furthermore, ISSF is urging all tuna RFMOs to adopt measures to prohibit deliberate purse seine setting around whale sharks, and the at-sea removal of shark fins – mandating that they remain naturally attached until the shark is landed.***
- ***ISSF also urges CPCs to follow the SCRS recommendation to report fishery statistics of all ICCAT and non- ICCAT fisheries capturing pelagic sharks, including recreational and artisanal fisheries.***

Harvest Control Rules (HCRs) and Reference Points. HCRs are a set of well-defined management actions to be taken in response to changes in stock status with respect to target and limit reference points. ISSF endorses the application of the Precautionary Approach using clear target and limit reference points and HCRs, as called for by the UN Fish Stocks Agreement and by some RFMO Conventions. ISSF applauds the successful first and second meetings of the Standing Working Group for Enhancing the Dialogue Between Fisheries Scientists and Managers (SWGSM) in 2014 and 2015.

- ***ISSF now urges the Commission to take this work into consideration for the establishment of target and limit reference points and a HCR for North Atlantic albacore and other priority stocks. This requires a thorough dialogue between decision makers, scientists and stakeholders involved in the process.***

Observer Coverage. Comprehensive observer coverage on vessels is a critical component of sustainable fisheries management for tropical tunas. ICCAT has 100% observer coverage on tropical tuna purse seiners, but only during the FAD moratorium. **ISSF urges ICCAT:**

- **To extend the 100% observer coverage on purse seine vessels to cover the entire year as the IATTC and WCPFC have done. This would be facilitated if it included a regional mechanism that provides that an observer from a coastal State national program (registered with the Secretariat) will be valid in other countries' EEZs.**
- **To strengthen compliance with the existing 5% longline observer coverage requirement by identifying and sanctioning non-compliance through the Compliance Committee.**

In order to assist RFMOs and CPCs in developing or strengthening their national, regional or sub-regional human observer programs for purse seine vessels, and to ensure that observer programs worldwide are striving to reach the same set of high standards, **ISSF published a technical paper that includes a set of best practices.** For more information, please see: <http://iss-foundation.org/2014/03/28/promoting-best-practices-for-purse-seine-observer-programs-worldwide/>

Convention Amendments. ISSF strongly supports the work of the Working Group on the Convention Amendment to modernize the ICCAT Convention. **ISSF urges ICCAT to adopt the Recommendations of this Working Group as a matter of priority.**

Full Retention of Tuna Catch. While other RFMOs have adopted tuna catch retention measures, to date ICCAT has not taken steps to do the same. The dumping of less valuable tuna in favor of higher value catch distorts our understanding of the actual impact on the tuna stocks by fishing operations. **ISSF continues to urge ICCAT to adopt comprehensive catch retention measures for all tunas.**

MCS: VMS, IUU Vessel Lists and Port State Measures. ISSF recommends that purse seine and longline vessels participate in VMS programs that meet global standards. To assist CPCs and RFMOs in achieving this goal, [ISSF published a technical paper that surveys the VMS programs in RFMOs](http://iss-foundation.org/2014/05/14/issf-technical-paper-surveying-vms-programs-in-rfmos), and **identifies a set of best practice elements** for States and RFMOs to use in developing or strengthening VMS programs for fishing vessels. **This technical paper highlights a number of areas in which the current ICCAT VMS provisions fall short of global best practices.** The amendments adopted in 2014 (Rec.14-09) begin to reform the ICCAT VMS by reducing the transmission rate from 6 to 4 hours and requiring flag States to work with coastal States to ensure that the position messages transmitted by vessels while fishing in coastal State waters are transmitted automatically and in real time to the coastal State that has authorized the fishing activity. However, this is just a first step. For more information, please see: <http://iss-foundation.org/2014/05/14/issf-technical-paper-surveying-vms-programs-in-rfmos>

- **ISSF urges ICCAT to adopt further amendments this year to modernize its VMS measure and bring it in line with global best practices, such as providing for the availability and use of VMS data to the Secretariat, SCRS scientists and the Compliance Committee.**

ISSF also published a technical paper that surveys the IUU Vessel List measures of RFMOs, and identifies a set of best practice elements for States and RFMOs to use in strengthening IUU Vessel Lists. This technical paper highlights a number of areas in which the current ICCAT IUU Vessel List provisions fall short of global best practices. For more information, and a link to the ISSF Technical Report, please see: <http://iss-foundation.org/resources/downloads/?did=585>

- **ISSF urges ICCAT to strengthen its IUU Vessel List process in line with best practices, such as clarifying the listing and delisting processes, harmonizing listing criteria and expanding the scope of admissible information.**
- **ISSF also urges all CPCs that have not yet done so to ratify the 2009 FAO Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing.**

Fish Aggregating Device (FAD) Management. Setting on FADs accounts for nearly 40% of global tuna catches and 50% of global skipjack catches. *ISSF notes the substantial progress made by ICCAT through the 2013 adoption of amendments to Recommendation 11-01 regarding FAD management and reporting, and creation in 2014 of a Working Group on FADs that involves all stakeholders. ISSF commends ICCAT for holding the first meeting of the Working Group in 2015. ISSF endorses the recommendations in the Report of the Working Group and encourages the Commission and SCRS to implement them. ISSF also urges ICCAT CPCs to:*

- **To adopt a marking scheme for identifying individual FADs.**
- **Implement the provisions in Recommendation 11-01 on the use of non-entangling FADs). ISSF encourages all CPCs to take this step as soon as possible and to undertake research on the effectiveness of various FAD designs. This is a critical step in the reduction of shark mortality and reduction of other ecosystem impacts in the Atlantic Ocean.**
- **To provide the FAD data as called for in Recommendation 11-01, and also a detailed analysis of FAD usage patterns and catch per effort analysis by their fleets operating in the Atlantic Ocean in order to enable a determination of changes in fishing capacity and likely impacts on stocks managed through ICCAT.**
- **To participate in and support the work of the ad hoc FAD Working Group so that it can provide recommendations to the Commission in 2016.**

Closed Vessel Registries and Management of Fleet Capacity. Experts agree that there is overcapacity in the global tuna fleets. Fishing fleet overcapacity increases pressure to weaken management measures and eventually leads to stock overexploitation. **ISSF continues to be concerned with the global growth of fishing capacity in ICCAT.**

- **ISSF urges ICCAT to establish limited entry through closed vessel registries and to develop a common currency to measure fishing capacity, such as cubic meters of well volume.**
- **ISSF also supports the Kobe III call for creating mechanisms to transfer capacity to developing countries.** Given the importance of a mechanism to transfer capacity from developed to developing countries to any regional capacity management scheme, ISSF hosted a Workshop to start a dialogue among stakeholders on this issue. ISSF hopes this Workshop and dialog will contribute to progressing capacity management in the tuna RFMOs. The workshop report can be accessed here: <http://iss-foundation.org/resources/downloads/?did=522>

Compliance. ICCAT has one of the best designed and most transparent compliance assessment process of the five tuna RFMOs. The one area where it can improve, however, is regarding its scheme of responses to non-compliance. The Compliance Committee is currently using such a scheme only on a pilot basis. **ISSF urges the Commission to finalize the development of a scheme of responses to non-compliance and codify it in a permanent Recommendation, as soon as possible.**

For more information tuna RFMO compliance processes, access an [ISSF Technical Report](http://iss-foundation.org/resources/downloads/?did=447) that includes a set of best practices at: <http://iss-foundation.org/resources/downloads/?did=447>