

## **Opening Statement on behalf of the United Kingdom Overseas Territories**

The UK Overseas Territories would like to extend their sincere thanks and appreciation to the Republic of Malta for hosting the 24<sup>th</sup> Regular Meeting.

The UK Overseas Territories represents four different United Kingdom Overseas Territories – Bermuda, the British Virgin Islands, Turks and Caicos Islands and the Territory of St. Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha. These are small coastal states in varying stages of development. During the year we have worked hard to meet all our ICCAT obligations and hope that we have managed to do so to the satisfaction of the Commission. The UK Government and its Overseas Territories are also committed to ensuring that marine resources are managed to a high standard, a strategy which was highlighted in the UK Government's most recent White Paper on the UK OTs. The UK Overseas Territories recognise that scientific information is necessary to underpin sound decision-making at ICCAT and are working with the UK Government to improve understanding of marine resources in the Territories.

We look forward to the outcome of species specific discussions in the Panels this year. For swordfish and bigeye tuna, we hope that Contracting Parties can work together in order to strengthen the management, and safeguard the future sustainability, of these fisheries, for the benefit of all members. Whilst the measures taken to protect sharks at previous annual meetings were very welcome, we would like to see the proposed recommendations adopted this year to protect other vulnerable shark species that are not already covered by specific ICCAT recommendations. In particular, we consider it essential that ICCAT takes firm action to protect the Porbeagle shark, as this species is now listed under Appendix 2 of CITES. Additionally, the UK Overseas Territories would support protection of Shortfin Mako. The UK Overseas Territories would also support strengthening the prohibition on shark-fining, as in previous years, as well as other measures to protect other bycatch species, such as birds and turtles.

The UKOTs would also like ICCAT to consider the resolution on the Sargasso Sea which we are tabling in conjunction with Canada, the European Union, South Africa, and the United States. This resolution seeks to allow continuation by the SCRS of the good work already done under the previous Sargasso Sea resolution, 12-12, with a further report in 2017. The Sargasso Sea is internationally recognised as an ecologically and biologically significant area, within which some ICCAT species are among the top predators. It is also important as a pupping, spawning and nursery area for several ICCAT species, including porbeagle, marlin and albacore tuna.

Finally, we would like to express our thanks and appreciation to the ICCAT Secretariat for the outstanding work that it continues to do on behalf of the Contracting Parties. We wish them, the chair of ICCAT, the other chairs of the various Committees and Panels and other Contracting Parties our best wishes for a constructive and successful meeting.