

Original: English

**STATEMENT BY BELIZE TO THE CHAIR OF PANEL 1 – ROUND 2**

Belize would like to thank the Chair for proposing a way forward in extending the provisions of Rec. 19-02 that were due to expire in 2020 to 2021 as outlined in Doc. No. PA1\_503A / 2020.

Considering the stock status for bigeye tunas, it is essential that the appropriate management measures are in place to ensure the continued sustainable utilization of this fish stock. While Rec. 19-02 made significant progress in achieving this objective, Belize remains concerned that there are still some important decisions to be made regarding catch limits and the management of the TAC, inter alia.

It is imperative to note that Belize's tropical tuna fishery represents the principal part of its high seas fisheries; and, without prejudice to our fishing rights, the agreed 10% reduction in recent average catches of BET as defined in Rec. 19-02 effectively translated to a 55% reduction in its catch limit. As a coastal developing State in ICCAT, this level of reduction is unsustainable and could threaten a collapse of our budding high seas industry. We noted that in the current allocation, of the BET quota, countries with no vessels or fewer vessels than Belize or those countries that are non-coastal states have been allocated almost similar quota but with half the fleet size and little to no historical catches. This is a situation that needs to be addressed as soon as is practicable for Panel 1 to have its next meeting.

Notwithstanding, the health and viability of the fish stock remains paramount and Belize continues to support meaningful and fair measures which reflects our shared but differentiated responsibility to conserve and manage the sustainable utilization of these species. Belize would like to invite all ICCAT CPCs that are members of Panel 1 to join us in supporting the Chair's proposal to carry forward the existing measures into 2021 with the intention to carry out further discussion on the additional measures.

We wish to also take this opportunity to highlight in the below **Annex** some of the other measures that Belize would like to see discussed as we move forward with these discussions in the future.

**Measures to be considered in the discussions on the management of the tropical tuna stocks**

- a. The number of fishing vessels for each country should be frozen to its number of vessels actively fishing in the area as at 31-12-2019 for all gear types. This is inclusive of supply vessels and should be considered for at period of at least four years in order to ensure that these preventative measures will allow stocks to be exploited at its MSY without incurring additional management measures resulting from overfishing.
- b. The FAD closure recommended for 3 months in 2021 should be reviewed and if necessary revised based on advise from the SCRS taking into account monthly trends in free school and FAD associated catches and the monthly variability in the proportion of juvenile tuna catches. Current closures cause excessive economic loss to the fleet without ascertaining whether if it is effective in reducing juvenile catches. Belize recommends to further reduce the number of active FADs and fix a reduced closure only if recommended by the SCRS.
- c. FADs should be 100% non-entangling and biodegradable with effect from 2022.
- d. Supply vessels should be regulated in terms of capacity by each flag allowing to register supply vessels only in cases where a purse seiner is registered under the same flag. This will allow for transparency between the supply vessel and purse seine vessels.
- e. Observer coverage needs to be improved and, in some cases, increased based on gear type. Belize supports 100% observer coverage for PS and 20% for the LL fleet. All other vessels should achieve at least 10% coverage for all its fishing trips.
- f. High Seas Transshipment should be prohibited due to its ability to increase the risk of IUU activities.