

LETTER FROM PA2 CHAIR ON DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS
(ICCAT Circular #6861/20)

October 5, 2020

Dear Panel 2 members:

Following the further instruction of the Commission Chair as well as the advice of the SCRS on each species, I would like to suggest the following actions for Panel 2 this year.

1. Mediterranean albacore (Rec. 17-05)

No action is required. Rec. 17-05 will continue to be valid.

2. Northern albacore (Recs. 16-06 and 17-04)

These Recommendations will continue to be valid except for some provisions which will expire at the end of 2020, including the TAC and allocations.

The SCRS calculated the TAC for this species using the HCR stipulated in Rec. 17-04. The new TAC is 37,801 t. I suggest replacing the current TAC with this new figure.

With respect to the allocations, some CPCs have informally expressed a desire to increase their allocations on a pro-rata basis as they believe this is part of the HCR and it would make no sense not to increase allocations when the TAC is increased.

I have given several thoughts on this issue. First, in my view the HCR is applicable only to the TAC, not allocations. Even if we assume it is part of the HCR, paragraph 18 of Rec. 17-04 says, "This Recommendation amends paragraphs 3 and 4 of Rec. 16-06 and does not set a precedent for future implementation of HCRs." Second, changing allocations has never been easy in ICCAT, particularly when the TAC increases. Negotiation on allocation should take place at a face-to-face meeting (i.e., the 2021 annual meeting) rather than through correspondence. On the other hand, I understand the sentiment that allocations should be increased when the TAC is increased. Also, a consensus could be established on new allocations even through correspondence.

Accordingly, I suggest applying a pro-rata increase for 2021 to: (i) allocations; (ii) the catch limit for minor harvesters (215 t); and (iii) the bycatch tolerance for Japan (4%) and see if there is any consensus. Please see PA2_606 for draft amendments to Rec. 16-06 and PA2_607 for Rec. 17-04, which reflect the ideas above. If I consider it difficult to find a consensus, I will give another suggestion, including a simple roll-over. In any case, (i), (ii) and (iii) above shall be reviewed and amended, as appropriate, in 2021.

Regarding consolidation of these Recommendations, one member supported while another member opposed. I suggest deferring such task to the intersessional period so that the 2021 annual meeting can adopt a combined Recommendation. Unless a Panel 2 member volunteers, I will circulate a first draft for consideration after finishing all the business this year. Please note that the two draft Recommendations above look a bit complicated because they are not combined.

3. Exceptional circumstances protocol for Northern albacore

You may recall that the Panel 2 Intersessional meeting last March decided to request the SCRS to review the Draft Protocol for Northern Albacore Exceptional Circumstances. The SCRS reviewed it and suggest amending "List of indicators to detect exceptional circumstances for north Atlantic albacore" (Table 14 of REPORT OF THE 2020 ICCAT ATLANTIC ALBACORE STOCK ASSESSMENT MEETING). I suggest deferring discussion on this to the 2021 Panel 2 Intersessional.

4. Western Atlantic BFT (Rec. 17-06)

This Recommendation will expire at the end of 2020. A simple roll-over or amendment is required. The SCRS expressed a concern about the stock status and provided different scenarios for TACs from 2021 to 2023.

I suggest extension of the current Recommendation for one year with necessary changes to TAC and allocations. For the 2021 TAC, I suggest taking Scenario 2 in BFTW-Table 4 (i.e., 1,785 t) since it prevents overfishing with more than 50% probability for 2021. The 2022 TAC should be decided at the 2021 Commission meeting based on inputs from the SCRS. There is a clear formula to calculate allocations among Western Atlantic BFT countries. I suggest simply following it. Paragraphs 16, 17, 18 and 20 have "2020", which shall be replaced with a different year. A draft Recommendation that reflects all these points is PA2_608.

5. Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean BFT (Rec. 19-04)

This Recommendation will continue to be valid except paragraphs 5, 7, 15, 21, 23, 26, 28, 33 and 115. The SCRS recommended 36,000 t for 2021 and 2022 on the condition that the 2022 TAC will be reviewed in 2021 based on updated abundance indices. I suggest following this recommendation since the MSE process is not likely to be completed in 2021 to calculate a TAC for 2022 and thereafter.

As to the request of Namibia and Russia for allocation, one member has already expressed opposition to it. Given the opposition and the extreme difficulty of allocation negotiation for this stock in the past, I suggest deferring the discussion to 2021, which means that the allocations and reserve will be maintained for 2021 and the Commission will discuss the requests at the 2021 Commission meeting.

I also would like to suggest that a Panel 2 intersessional meeting be held early March next year to review fishing and management plans of CPCs involved in the fishery and farming as well as to discuss draft Recommendations to be submitted by EU. Please see PA2_609 for a draft Recommendation amending Rec. 19-04 based on these ideas.

6. MSE for BFT

Regarding the MSE process for BFT, the SCRS suggests that multiple scientists-managers meetings be held after the interim results from the MSE become available. They predict that the timing would be from the second half of 2021 to early 2022. I propose that one meeting be held in the latter half of 2021 and the 2021 Commission meeting could consider another if necessary. In addition, the Panel 2 intersessional meeting next March could be utilized to exchange views between the SCRS and BFT managers if the SCRS so wishes.

7. A request for clarification on BFT farming

The Chair has recently received a request for clarification from the BFT sub-group on Growth in farms. The sub-group has been holding discussions on several relevant matters regarding the provision of a response to the Commission on maximum growth in farms. During the discussion, they encountered one question on the timing from which growth should be estimated. After caught by purse seiner, BFT are often towed for several days up to a month before the caging operation. During this period the fish tend to lose weight. The group discussed whether growth should be estimated from the time of catch or caging but could not reach consensus and decided to ask Panel 2.

The Chair considers that the objective of this practice is to see if the observed growth can be scientifically justified by comparing the caged weight with harvested weight. Thus, the Chair believes that the timing should be at the time of caging. There is another question, however, on the use of caged weight if fish loses weight because if the caged weight is used to estimate the catch weight, it is likely to be underestimated. To overcome this problem, there must be a certain formula to convert the caged weight to the catch weight, depending on the length of towing. I welcome further inputs from Panel 2 members. If Panel 2 cannot agree on the response to the group, this will be brought to the Panel 2 intersessional meeting next March.

Finally, I would like to clarify some procedural issues. "Essential Business of Panel 2" in Circular 6716/2020 dated 29 September 2020 says, "Any response shall be submitted within two weeks from receipt." Since the same Circular also says, "The period of correspondence will start on 19 October 2020", members are supposed to submit comments by 2 November even when this letter and draft Recommendations are circulated before 19 October 2020.

I look forward to working with you all in the next several weeks.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shingo Ota', is written on a light-colored background.

Shingo Ota
Panel 2 Chair