

GENERAL STATEMENT RELATING TO PROPOSALS SUBMITTED TO PANEL 2

(Submitted by the European Union)

**EU STATEMENT ON DRAFT RECOMMENDATION BY ICCAT AMENDING
THE RECOMMENDATION 16-06 ESTABLISHING A MULTI-ANNUAL CONSERVATION AND
MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME FOR NORTH ATLANTIC ALBACORE**

Documents PA2-606/2020 and PA2-607/2020 (Chair proposals)

The European Union welcomes the proposals from the Chair to adapt the *Recommendation by ICCAT on a Multi-annual Conservation and Management Program for North Atlantic Albacore* (Rec. 16-06) and the *Recommendation by ICCAT on a Harvest Control Rule for the North Atlantic Albacore Supplementing the Multiannual Conservation and Management Programme, Rec. 16-06* (Rec. 17-04) to secure a rollover of the existing measures for 2021. Ideally, as suggested by the Chair, both Recommendations should be merged in one, if possible, already in 2021.

However, the EU does not share the view of the Chair that the increase of the TAC should automatically trigger a revision of the allocation key. Considering precedents on this and other stocks, the updating of the TAC (increase or decrease) is not coupled necessarily with the revision of the allocation key, but with the modification of individual CPCs allocations following the pro-rata principle. It would be odd that an increase in the TAC would not immediately transpose into an increase of the allocations to CPCs participating in the fishery and that the increase of the TAC should not reward the CPCs responsible for the good stewardship of the resource.

The EU support the reviewing of the interim HCR in 2021 as mentioned by the Chair of Panel 2 under paragraph 3 of PA2-607, with a view to adopting a long term management procedure, and this will require the adequate organisation of Commission/SCRS' meetings regarding albacore tuna.

**EU STATEMENT ON A DRAFT RECOMMENDATION BY ICCAT AMENDING
RECOMMENDATION 19-04 ESTABLISHING A MULTI-ANNUAL MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR BLUEFIN
TUNA IN THE EASTERN ATLANTIC AND THE MEDITERRANEAN**

Document PA2-609/2020 (Chair's proposal)

The EU agrees with the Chair's proposal with two comments, one regarding growth rates in farms and another on the evaluation of the possible modification of the fishing seasons. This last point is directly related to paragraph 18 of the *Recommendation by ICCAT Amending the Recommendation 18-02 establishing a multi-annual management plan for bluefin tuna in the eastern Atlantic and the Mediterranean* (Rec. 19-04), which is not mentioned in the Chair's proposal but we consider crucial to ensure the correct adjustment of the fishing capacity. Therefore, we propose in paragraph 18 to change the date by which the parameters should be reviewed by the SCRS from the current '2019' to '2021'.

On growth rates, we consider that the determination of those indices is urgent, and we urge the SCRS to produce them at the latest in 2022. In our view, the parameters of the fishing seasons is linked, in particular for purse seiners, with the revision of the 'best catch rates', which, following paragraph 18 of Rec. 19-04, was expected in 2019.

Regarding the amendment of **paragraph 5** of Rec. 19-04, we suggest modifying the last sentence in the paragraph as follows: "*the allocation scheme above shall may be reviewed and amended, as appropriate, at the 2021 Commission annual meeting*".

Regarding the amendment of **paragraph 15** of Rec. 19-04 we suggest that an intersessional meeting of Panel 2 to analyse and, as appropriate, endorse the plans referred to under paragraph 14: "*shall be convened not only for 2021 but during the implementation of the plan*". The number of issues found in different plans in previous years suggests that it would be prudent to maintain the peer review of the fishing and capacity plans.

**EU STATEMENT ON A DRAFT RECOMMENDATION BY ICCAT EXTENDING AND AMENDING
REC. 17-06 FOR AN INTERIM CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR
WESTERN ATLANTIC BLUEFIN TUNA**

Documents PA2-610 (US proposal) & PA2-608 (Chair proposal)

The European Union is acutely aware that the soundness of the scientific assessment of a harvested fish stock is highly dependent on the quality of the data being used and that in turn, such data is often obtained through an incremental process requiring time and resources. This is particularly true for Atlantic bluefin tuna, and for that reason, the EU has provided substantial support to the SCRS, in particular in the context of the GBYP. We acknowledge the tremendous and successful coordinated work done on BFT by the SCRS scientists, although there are still some issues requiring further attention and improvements.

The recent SCRS updated assessment for western bluefin tuna (BFTW), although it does not include estimates of biomass reference points to determine the stock status, because of the uncertainty in recruitment potential, does however provide a clear picture of the persistent low biomass compared to historical levels, albeit slightly increasing over the last 10 years. Both assessment models are consistent in that regard and also show a declining trend in the estimated recruitment.

Although the SCRS considers that overfishing is not occurring with high probability, we operate in an unstable context where slight changes in the model setting and in the data may provide a different perspective; the catch limit of 2,350 t established in 2017 is now considered to have resulted in overfishing since 2018, although the reported catches complied with the catch limit.

Under these circumstances, and considering that the recent assessment is much more robust than the one done in 2017, the EU appreciates the initiatives from both the Panel 2 Chair (PA2-608) and the US (PA2-610) seeking to propose a way forward taking into account the SCRS advice for the rebuilding of the BFTW stock, but we would be concerned with retaining any management option that would not, at the very least, stop overfishing immediately with a reasonable degree of probability.

The way forward proposed by the United States raises some concerns for the European Union in terms of potentially derailing the SCRS activities in 2021, particularly for what concerns the MSE advancements. The SCRS has established a quite ambitious 2021 workplan with a view to substantially advance and secure some significant achievements on the BFT MSE, which is a priority for the EU, while also dedicating specific effort through two focussed technical groups to address sources of uncertainty on indices and assessment models as identified in the 2020 updated assessment. These actions, that may require financial support from ICCAT, will necessitate a sustained engagement by the scientists whose focus must not be affected by concerns related to a review of the WBFT catch limit expiring in 2021. In that respect we would like to recall that the MSE for BFT started in 2015 and was expected to be finalized by 2019; the GBYP ICCAT multiyear programme, 80% funded by the EU to a total of €14M so far, has substantially supported the MSE process by investing around €1M since 2014 without mentioning the investments done by the scientists of the different CPCs. Moreover, ICCAT has adopted *the Resolution by ICCAT on Development of Initial Management Objectives for Eastern and Western Bluefin Tuna* (Res. 18-03) on the development of initial management objectives as another preliminary steps towards the development of an MSE based harvesting strategy. The SCRS's workplan for BFT assumes that the WBFT TAC advice for 2021 and 2022 will be adopted and that a new full stock assessment will take place in 2022.

In addition to the added workload that would be generated by a new assessment for WBFT, we note that there are already many assessments scheduled for 2021 and that it is unlikely that any physical meeting will take place during the first semester of 2021. This will require organising virtual meetings, which in turn take place over longer periods than conventional meetings, therefore putting additional pressure on scientists and on the Secretariat.

For the above reasons, and considering the soundness of the 2020 stock assessment, the EU is not supportive of amending the existing SCRS planning for the stock assessments to facilitate a new assessment for western bluefin tuna in 2021, unless the SCRS confirms that the additional work would not impact on the finalisation of the MSE for BFT and other stocks such as northern swordfish, and would not put an extra burden upon the scientists and the Secretariat.

This approach is, of course, without prejudice to the fact that the SCRS could further improve its analysis and understanding of the indices and providing its considerations on the indices trends based on such an improved analysis of the indices in 2021. But it should not be seen as a formal task to re-discuss the established catch limit in 2021.

**EU STATEMENT ON THE CORRESPONDANCE FROM THE PANEL 2 CHAIR REGARDING THE
DISCLOSURE OF BFT SPECIES GROUP MEETING INFORMATION**

Document PA2-604/2020

The European Union supports the conclusions of the Chair and shares the view that this issue should be included on the Agenda of the plenary meeting of 2021. The European Union also believes that observers and scientists should refrain from revealing such information at least until the report is completed and uploaded to the website.

In addition to the Chair's proposal, the European Union suggests discussing the possibility to establish a code of conduct for participants in such meetings and/or the modification of the rules of procedure.