

**LETTER FROM PA2 CHAIR ON BLUEFIN TUNA
(WAY FORWARD ON ROUND 2 OF CORRESPONDANCE PERIOD)**



FISHERIES AGENCY

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND FISHERIES, GOVERNMENT OF JAPAN

1-2-1, Kasumigaseki, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100-8907, Japan

[ICCAT Entrada 10601 dated 6 November 2020]

November 6, 2020

Dear Panel 2 members:

Further to my letter on NALB, I would like to deal with issues related to BFT in this letter.

1. Western Atlantic BFT (PA2-608 proposed by the Panel 2 Chair and PA2-610 proposed by the United States)

There are basically two outstanding issues: (i) the TAC level for 2021 (and possibly 2022 and 2023); and (ii) Whether to conduct a new stock assessment for WBFT in 2021, one year earlier than the SCRS original schedule.

As to the TAC level, the United States does not support my proposal (1,785 t) with preference to the status quo. Mexico does not support my proposal, either and suggests a simple roll-over (2,350 t) for one year, given the current difficult circumstances. Japan expressed a similar view, while acknowledging the need to pick up one of the six scenarios presented by the SCRS. On the other hand, Canada and Norway supported my proposal. The European Union did not provide explicit support for my proposal, but I sensed that they supported it since they say that overfishing should be stopped immediately with a reasonable probability. PEW supported my proposal and WWF stated that TAC should be reduced to at least 1,785 t.

Regarding the new stock assessment, Canada supports the idea with emphasis that it should be a new full stock assessment and an external expert on stock assessment should be hired. On the other hand, the European Union opposed the idea since it is likely to delay the BFT MSE process and negatively impact the already busy SCRS schedule unless the SCRS indicates otherwise. Norway also expressed concern about possible delay of the BFT MSE process and did not support the idea. Japan reserved its position as it needs to receive additional clarification from the SCRS on possible impacts of such a new work on the SCRS schedule.

In order to resolve this, I requested the SCRS Chair to explain whether it would be possible to conduct a new full stock assessment without undermining the other work of the SCRS, particularly the BFT MSE and organized informal web meetings to discuss this issue based on his inputs. The response of the SCRS Chair is that it is possible to do that with minimal impact on the other work of the SCRS on the condition that: (i) a new three-day meeting will be held in September; (ii) most of the work will be conducted outside usual BFT WG meetings, namely, by the newly established BFT Indices Subgroup/modelers; (iii) main WBFT harvesters (Canada, Japan, Mexico and the United States) will submit the 2020 data as early as possible and before the July deadline, and (iv) an external expert will be hired to review, prepare a report and present the findings to the BFT Species Group (I understand Canada will fund this).

Several concerns were expressed. First, it is quite rare to conduct a stock assessment in two consecutive years and justification for such request should be duly provided. Several CPCs said that this should not be a precedent for the Commission. In response, it was clarified that the BFT Species Group was aware that stock indices had problems and should be modified, but since the SCRS had previously decided that the 2020 assessment be a strict update, they had no choice but to use them although this point is not clear in the SCRS report.

Second, it is not yet clear whether this additional work could be done without impacting the other SCRS work since most of the SCRS meetings in the first six months in 2021 are likely to be virtual. This means that each meeting will need to have extra days compared to a face-to-face mode. In addition, such a new work may increase the workload of the Secretariat. It was clarified that the proposed new three-day meeting for the WBFT stock assessment should take place in September to avoid conflicts with other meetings. In any case, the SCRS Chair will consult with other SCRS officers and the Secretariat on required schedule changes, taking into account the pandemic situation and the need to conduct a new stock assessment for WBFT.

Third, some CPCs said that if the SCRS conducts a new stock assessment in 2021, which may change the TAC advice, the Commission should reduce the TAC in accordance with the SCRS advice. Requesting the assessment and keeping the TAC at the current level is too much. While expressing sympathy with the argument, I pointed out that the current Recommendation (Rec. 17-06) would expire at the end of this year and there would be no measures if there is no consensus and that the Commission should avoid such case at any rate while it should respect the SCRS advice.

Taking these points into account, I would like to suggest the following (actual texts in the Recommendation are slightly different):

TAC:

Panel 2 should follow Scenario 3 in BFTW-Table 4 of the SCRS 2020 Advice to the Commission. TACs will be 2,350 t, 1,685 t and 1,632 t for 2021, 2022 and 2023, respectively. The TACs for 2022 and 2023 shall be unchanged unless the Commission decides otherwise based on new advice from the SCRS.

Stock assessment:

There shall be a new full stock assessment, which shall be conducted in a way that does not negatively affect the other work of the SCRS, particularly the ongoing MSE work for BFT. For this purpose, an external expert shall be hired with a voluntary fund from Canada to review, prepare a report and present the findings to the BFT Species Group. There will be no stock assessment in 2022 that was originally proposed by the SCRS.

Please note that the SCRS Chair indicated that due to the pandemic, the SCRS would anyway have to consider rearranging the meeting schedule, particularly those in the first semester of 2021 because they are likely to be virtual ones, which require additional days. Under normal circumstances, the sequence of actions should be: (i) the decision of Panel 2 to request the SCRS to conduct the assessment; (ii) the decision of the SCRS to accommodate such request; (iii) submission of the revised schedule of the SCRS meetings to the Commission; and (iv) approval of the revised schedule by the Commission. Under the current extraordinary circumstances, I would like to request the SCRS to consider this request on a temporary basis in parallel with the discussion at Panel 2.

On a separate issue, Canada proposed the increase in the percentage of carry-over from 10 to 25% on a temporary basis because the TAC is not likely to be consumed 100% due to the decreased demand caused by the pandemic. I put a new footnote to be attached to paragraph 7 (a) based on Canada's suggested text for your review.

Please see PA2-608A as attached to reflect all these points and provide your views.

2. Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean BFT (PA2-609)

(1) TACs

I suggested following the SCRS recommendation that the TACs for 2021 and 2022 be 36,000 tons, respectively, on the condition that the 2022 TAC will be reviewed in 2021 based on updated abundance indices. The European Union, Iceland, Japan, Morocco and Norway supported these ideas. PEW and WWF also supported my proposal. The United States supported the TAC for 2021, but as to the TAC for 2022, said that the Recommendation shall clearly stipulate that the TAC shall not exceed 36,000 t for 2022, given serious uncertainties involved in the EBFT assessment. I should stress that I simply copied the last paragraph of "Management recommendations" in the 2020 SCRS Advice to the Commission, which says, "*Consequently, the Committee recommends that the 2020 TAC [Rec. 19-04 para. 5] of 36,000 t be maintained for 2021 and 2022. However, the 2022 advice will be reviewed in 2021 based on updates of the abundance indicators as has been done in recent years.*" It does not say that the TAC for 2022 shall not exceed 36,000 t due to the uncertainties of the stock assessment. Although the 2022 TAC is likely to be 36,000 t in my personal view, we should avoid any sentence prejudging the outcome of the review next year. Consequently, I suggest keeping my original text with some modifications to 3rd and 4th preambular paragraphs.

(2) Allocations

I suggested deferring discussion on allocation, including the request of Namibia and Russia for new allocation, to the 2021 Commission annual meeting. In response, Russia submitted comments that (i) Russia is going through the worst economic period since the war; (ii) the reserve will be an economic loss if not used; and (iii) Thus, Russia would like to ask Panel 2 Members to reconsider the possibility of allocation (I assume 70.7 tons according to its plan) to Russia. Once again, I would like to seek the views of Panel 2 Members on this request.

Algeria requested clarification on the meaning of the last sentence of para 1 in PA2-609 (the last sentence in para 5 of Recommendation.), that is, "*The allocation scheme above shall be reviewed and amended, as appropriate, at the 2021 Commission annual meeting.*" They posed two specific questions: (i) Does the allocation scheme mean the allocation criteria?; and (ii) Does it include allocations to Mauritania and Senegal or all the CPCs? The European Union suggested changing "shall" to "may". This is related to the request of Russia and Namibia. Since I suggested deferring the discussion on the request of Namibia and Russia for new allocation to 2021 in my previous letter, I needed to put this sentence to give them some assurance that their request will be discussed in 2021. Therefore, I do not envisage any discussion on the allocation criteria themselves although CPCs may want to refer to them when discussing any allocation issues. Also, allocations to Mauritania and Senegal are research quota that are currently covered by the unallocated reserve. If these CPCs request allocations in 2021, such requests will be part of the discussion. Perhaps the word "scheme" sounds a bit too systemic and should be deleted. Regarding the suggestion from the European Union, I suggest keeping "shall" because of the reasons above. Accordingly, the final sentence will be "*The allocations above shall be reviewed and amended, as appropriate, at the 2021 Commission meeting.*"

Korea and Chinese Taipei expressed their desire to revive the last sentence of paragraph 5 in Rec. 19-04 that has been deleted, but I decided not to do so because paragraph 10 allows them to make such transfer without approval of the Commission as long as they follow the procedure contained therein.

(3) Panel 2 Intersessional

I suggested 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 the European Union. The European Union suggested that this meeting be held not only in 2021 but also during the entire period of implementing the plan. I would like to point out that the new paragraph 15 of the Recommendation (para 3 of PA2-609) says, "..... *This obligation may be revised after 2021 to allow endorsement of the plans to be done by electronic means.*" This means that the default is to hold the meeting every year and can be replaced with an electronic one if the Commission agrees. Accordingly, I do not see the need to change the language to reflect the point made by the European Union.

As I wrote in my previous letter on NALB, however, it would be very difficult to hold any physical meeting in Madrid until May next year since the Spanish government has decided to extend the current restrictions until that time. I will discuss the meeting arrangement with the Secretariat and inform you of the results in due course.

(4) Capacity management

The European Union suggested that "2019" in para 18 of Rec. 19-04 be changed to "2021". I agree and suggest adding a new para reflecting this.

3. Other issues related to BFT

(1) MSE for BFT

Regarding the MSE process for BFT, I proposed that one meeting be held in the latter half of 2021 and the 2021 Commission meeting could consider another if necessary. I also provided my view that the Panel 2 intersessional meeting next March could be utilized to exchange views between the SCRS and BFT managers if the SCRS so wishes, but this would be probably very difficult if the meeting is not a face-to-face one. The United States commented that a meeting of scientists and managers should be organized (no indication on timing) and a stock assessment for WBFT in 2021 is essential to make progress on BFT MSE. I will report to plenary that one meeting of scientists and managers should be held in 2021.

(2) BFT farming

Regarding the question on the timing from which growth should be estimated, Japan and the United States supported my ideas that it should be at the time of caging. Regarding the possibility of underestimate, Japan suggested that the discussion be deferred to the Panel 2 intersessional meeting next March and the United States seems to support this, but I am not clear at this stage whether this is possible.

(3) BFT catch by Gibraltar

In response to the concern expressed by the European Union, I circulated a separate letter (Circular 7045/2020) to ask the views of Panel 2 Members on the BFT catches by Gibraltar. Norway shared the same concern but could not think of a good way forward since the Commission had been repeatedly requesting Gibraltar to cooperate with it, which resulted in little progress so far and therefore wants to hear from others. Japan said that this issue would require in-person discussion while seeking clarification on: (i) whether Brexit will affect this; and (ii) whether Gibraltar exports the catch. I would like to suggest deferring the discussion to the 2021 annual meeting while requesting the Secretariat to contact Gibraltar to clarify these two points.

(4) PA2-604

The European Union supported my letter concerning how to handle the results of SCRS meetings (PA2-604). This will be discussed at the 2021 Commission meeting.

Finally, as per Circular 7324/2020, CPCs who may have comments can submit those as Statements to the Panel 2, as the Commission Chair agreed to allow one statement per CPC and subsidiary body in each round of the correspondence period. These will be translated and posted on the 2020 Commission documents webpage. Comments other than in the form of statements may also be forwarded to me and the Secretariat, but these will not be translated to avoid delays on the decision-making process. There will be a two-week period for comments. The exact deadline will be specified by the Secretariat as it depends on their translation.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shingo Ota', is centered on the page. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Shingo Ota
Panel 2 Chair