

**STATEMENT FROM CANADA TO PANEL 2 (ROUND 2)
WESTERN ATLANTIC BLUEFIN TUNA (WBFT)**

Canada recognizes that the 2020 update to the 2017 stock assessment was not able to fully explore all the data input, including a rigorous review of the indices. Therefore, Canada continues to strongly support the undertaking of a full stock assessment for 2021, and is pleased that this can be undertaken without delaying the important work on the Bluefin tuna Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE).

Canada also welcomes the establishment of an SCRS subgroup to conduct a thorough evaluation of the current indices of abundance and their use in the WBFT stock assessment. A thorough review of these indices will improve the assessment, and testing them through the assessment will significantly benefit the MSE from a technical perspective and ensure that all CPCs, observers, and other interested parties have greater confidence in both the assessment and the MSE.

Despite these concerns about the 2020 update, it is nevertheless the best scientific advice currently available and therefore the more appropriate basis for a decision about the 2021 total allowable catch (TAC). The current advice is clear that a rollover of the 2020 TAC of 2350 t will almost certainly lead to overfishing in 2021. Thus, out of precaution, Canada continues to support a TAC of 1785 t for 2021, which is associated with a 58 per cent probability of not overfishing for 2021.

The $F_{0.1}$ strategy makes it possible to calculate a TAC at the target fishing mortality, but in the absence of biomass reference points it is not possible to evaluate the consequences of that TAC with respect to biomass reference points. The SCRS is requested to provide proxies or approximations for all maximum sustainable yield reference points and evaluate status relative to them the next time it provides advice for western Bluefin tuna.

Canada appreciates the Chair's inclusion of contracting an external expert to review the stock assessment process, and would like to clarify that their intended role would not be to lead the assessment, vet the results, or prepare and present the report. Rather, our proposal is to have the external expert review the stock assessment *process* as it unfolds, prepare a report on that process review, and present it to the Bluefin tuna species group. This would be conducted in line with the existing terms of reference for inclusion of external experts by the SCRS.

Canada would also like to highlight the importance of the proposed temporary increase in the maximum percentage of underharvest that some CPCs are permitted to carry forward, and the immediate benefit that this measure would have for our harvesters. Canada asks whether other CPCs can agree to this temporary increase as soon as possible rather than waiting for the correspondence process to conclude, by which point an increase may come too late to be helpful.