

2020 INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE CONSERVATION OF ATLANTIC TUNAS (ICCAT) MEETING, BY CORRESPONDENCE

The impacts of COVID-19 have presented challenges to regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs) in conducting meetings in 2020. The International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) cancelled its in-person Commission and science (SCRS) meetings and will be taking decisions by correspondence.

Even under these challenging circumstances, ICCAT must ensure the uninterrupted, sustainable management of the tuna stocks and marine ecosystems under its purview. In particular, there are several critical measures and issues that require immediate attention by ICCAT this year.

This Statement focuses on those critical measures and issues on which ICCAT must take action in 2020 or advance work in 2021, which align with the ISSF global priorities for tuna RFMOs.

Tuna Conservation

What are the issues?

Effective management measures are needed to ensure bigeye and yellowfin tuna catches are maintained at sustainable levels.

Why are we concerned?

There were no tropical tuna assessments in 2020. However, for several years now, the catches of bigeye and yellowfin have exceeded the TACs. This was the case again in 2019 when the TACs were exceeded by 14% and 20% respectively. This systematic lack of compliance is troubling and needs to be addressed, for example, by completely allocating the TACs so that CPC-specific non-compliances can be identified.

What is ISSF asking ICCAT to do?

(1) At a minimum, ensure that ICCAT recommendations set to expire this year do not lapse, including the interim catch limits measures for bigeye in Rec. 19-02 and the Total Allowable Catch (TACs) and other catch limit measures on Northern Albacore and Southern Albacore tunas in Rec. 16-06 and Rec. 16-07.

Our Top Asks for ICCAT in 2020/2021:

- 1** Ensure that Recommendations that are about to partially or fully expire, continue to be effective in 2021.
- 2** Adopt a work plan for FADs with a timeframe to transition to FADs without nets and made primarily with biodegradable materials, develop recovery policies and a marking scheme, and require FAD position data and acoustic records.
- 3** Accelerate the adoption of harvest strategies for tropical tunas.
- 4** Adopt minimum standards for electronic monitoring so to be able to require 100% observer coverage (human and/or electronic) for all major ICCAT fisheries, and all vessels engaged in at-sea transshipment, within five years.
- 5** Request the Compliance Committee to address non-compliance with FAD data reporting requirements.

(2) In 2020 or 2021, fully allocate the TACs by CPC.

Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs)

What are the issues?

In the Atlantic, FAD sets account for nearly 53% of tropical tuna catches, including 78% of skipjack catches. Comprehensive data on FAD deployments and usage are required to effectively manage the tropical tuna purse seine fishery. Currently deployed FADs should be lower-entangling and fleets should be moving towards fully non-entangling using primarily biodegradable materials to mitigate ecosystem impacts and reducing marine debris.

Why are we concerned?

Only a few CPCs submit the required FAD data, usually incompletely, thus hindering regional analyses by SCRS. This problem has been ongoing since 2014 and needs the attention of the Compliance Committee. ICCAT requires non-entangling FADs, but this measure and its compliance also needs to be reinforced.

What is ISSF asking ICCAT to do?

- (1) In 2021, amend Rec 19-02 (or its successor measure) to:
 - (i) Specify in Annex 5 that non-entangling FADs should not use any netting.
 - (ii) Require fleets to remove entangling FADs found in the water.
 - (iii) Design and adopt FAD-recovery mechanisms and incentives by 2022.
 - (iv) Require vessels to provide complete FAD position data and acoustic records from echosounder buoys.
 - (v) Develop and adopt a FAD marking scheme by 2022 for all new FAD deployments, regardless of vessel type, that requires that FADs be marked on both the buoy and the FAD structure.
- (2) In 2021, request the Compliance Committee to address non-compliance with FAD data reporting requirements, and recommend corrective measures, including those in paragraph 31 of Rec. 19-02;
- (3) Request the SCRS to provide science-based limits on FAD deployments and/or FAD sets by 2022.

Harvest Strategies

What are the issues?

Harvest Strategies — which include target and limit reference points together with harvest control rules — provide pre-agreed rules for managing fisheries resources and acting on stock status changes.

Why are we concerned?

ICCAT has been developing harvest strategies and testing them through MSE and seeking to adopt them for priority stocks within a planned timeframe. However, accelerated action is needed for tropical tunas. The MSC has established deadlines for harvest strategy and harvest control rules (HCRs) Principle 1 conditions for certified tuna fisheries. For tuna stocks in the ICCAT Convention Area, if HCRs are not adopted by 2022 for yellowfin and skipjack tuna (western), current MSC certifications for these stocks will be suspended.

What is ISSF asking ICCAT to do?

In 2021, include an item on MSE in the meeting of Panel 1 in order to continue to advance the work for tropical tunas.

Bycatch and Sharks

What are the issues?

Mako sharks are fished for food, their fins and sport, with no international catch limitations in place. Science-based conservation and management measures to limit fishing mortality on sharks must be adopted and implemented.

Why are we concerned?

In the North Atlantic, the SCRS notes it could take ~25 years to rebuild mako shark stocks even if fishing mortality rates were cut to zero. Action is long overdue, as scientists first issued advice to address this problem in 2017 and ICCAT has still not acted.

What is ISSF asking ICCAT to do?

In 2021, adopt a new Recommendation for shortfin mako sharks that: (i) Immediately prohibits all shortfin mako retentions; and (ii) Ensures specific scientific advice for minimizing incidental mortality is developed and implemented.

Monitoring, Control and Surveillance

What are the issues?

Comprehensive observer coverage on vessels is critical to sustainable fisheries management for tropical tunas.

Why are we concerned?

ICCAT currently requires 5% for longline fisheries, which is not being fully complied with. This coverage rate will increase to 10% by 2022 for fisheries targeting tropical tunas. The SCRS has highlighted that 5% observer coverage is inadequate to provide reasonable estimates of total bycatch and recommended to increase coverage to 20%. The paucity of data from longline fisheries hinders the development of effective conservation measures.

What is ISSF asking ICCAT to do?

In 2021, direct the SCRS and IMM Working Group to: (i) develop standards for electronic monitoring (EM) and a workplan and timeline for implementation of a comprehensive EM and electronic reporting program, including for logbooks, with emphasis on longline vessels; and (ii) develop an ICCAT regional Observer Program (per Rec. 19-02) so to be able to require 100% observer coverage (human and/or electronic) for all major ICCAT fisheries, and all vessels engaged in at-sea transshipment, within five years.

Compliance

What are the issues?

ICCAT has one of the best designed and most transparent compliance assessment processes of the five tuna RFMOs, but it can be strengthened. A strong compliance process improves fisheries management.

Why are we concerned?

ICCAT has enhanced its compliance assessment process, but procedural and policy improvements are still needed.

What is ISSF asking ICCAT to do?

In 2021, the Compliance Committee adopts a workplan to develop audit points for ICCAT measures, such as those developed for sharks in [Rec. 18-06](#).

ISSF Global Priorities for Tuna RFMOs

Implementation of rigorous harvest strategies, including harvest control rules and reference points.

Effective management of fleet capacity, including developing mechanisms that support developing coastal state engagement in the fishery.

Science-based FAD management & non-entangling and biodegradable FAD designs.

Increased member compliance with all adopted measures, and greater transparency of processes reviewing member compliance with measures.

Strengthened Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS) measures and increased observer coverage, including through modern technologies such as electronic monitoring and e-reporting.

Adoption of best-practice bycatch mitigation and shark conservation and management measures.

Did You Know?

ISSF is collaborating on biodegradable FAD research with fleets , coastal nations, and other stakeholders.

ISSF resources for vessels include skippers guidebooks on bycatch-mitigation techniques as well as reports on electronic monitoring and vessel monitoring systems.

ISSF offers guidelines for implementing non-entangling FADs.

Three ISSF conservation measures focus on shark bycatch.



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