

**STATEMENT FROM CANADA ON STACFAD ESSENTIAL BUSINESS**

Canada appreciates the documentation provided, especially under the difficult circumstances this year.

As an overarching comment on the financial report (STF-202) and revised budget for 2021 (STF-203), we note that, while many implications of the COVID-19 pandemic are implicitly reflected in ICCAT's finances for 2020, these implications are not then reflected in the proposed 2021 budget. Even if the current proposed budget is largely based on a budget approved at last year's meeting, as we plan in our budget the Commission's finances for the coming years it is important to consider the most up-to-date information possible, and then incorporate this into our budgeting.

There are a number of items in the financial report from 2020 where expenditures have been much less than the amount budgeted and where the bulk of underspending is presumably due to the pandemic's effects, especially on travel. These items include travel by the Secretariat, meeting hosting, publications, science meetings, and travel by ICCAT and SCRS chairs and officers, to name only a few. Additionally, the Meeting Participation Fund spent only a small fraction of its allotment this year, but is projected to draw an even larger amount from the ICCAT budget next year, despite the likelihood of continued travel disruptions well into 2021, as well as a large balance held over from 2020. Other funds and programs have varying degrees of underspending in 2020, leading to a substantial overall surplus in the Commission's finances for 2020, and yet an even larger budget than that agreed last year has been requested for 2021.

In our view the significant underspending in 2020 and likelihood of further underspending in 2021 requires discussion by STACFAD, ideally supported by some analysis, options and recommendations from the Secretariat. This would allow the Committee to recommend to the Commission a way forward based on the latest information, as well as reasonable expectations about how we will undertake our business in the face of an ongoing pandemic.

As an additional comment, we recall that, as per discussion at the 2019 Commission meeting, it was agreed that the SCRS would not provide additional funds to support tropical tuna MSE work in 2020. Canada continues to caution against undertaking too many MSEs concurrently and believes the current MSEs for BFT, nSWO, and ALB should have management procedures in place before another MSE is undertaken. It is also of note that the Strategic Research Fund has a balance of 744,000 euros due to under-expenditures in 2020. Canada requests that this amount be considered when distributing funds to the list of SCRS research proposed for 2021 and the associated call for voluntary contributions.