

**Statement to Plenary in relation to Panels 1 and 2**

*(Submitted by the European Union)*

**Panel 1**

The European Union (EU) would like to thank the Chair of Panel 1 for guiding the work of the Panel in these extraordinary circumstances.

In his report, the Chair referred to objections formulated regarding proposal PA1-503 and concluded that there is therefore no agreement on this proposal. The European Union disagrees with this conclusion and instead would like to highlight that there has been no objection to the initial proposal from the Chair for a rollover of the existing measures, including paragraph 4 of recommendation 19-02. There was only some comments of a purely editorial nature, which were accommodated under proposal PA1-503A. Since the additional comments referred to by the Chair were received only after acceptance by all the Parties of proposal PA1-503A, and after the two weeks deadline, they are not receivable and we therefore believe that the amended draft proposal PA1-503A reflects the agreed outcome of the correspondence period and must be considered adopted. It should also be noted that the Commission Chair, in Circular # 5924/2020, instructed that *"In the case of lack of consensus on proposals to amend measures that do not expire, the debate will simply be closed and the existing measures will continue to apply in 2021"*. This applies to the Recommendation 19-02, thus making PA1-503, which stipulates a roll-over of the existing measures, the legitimate outcome of the decision making process.

The European Union would like to express its disappointment at the late submission of comments on this proposal and the possible attempt to prevent its adoption. We are particularly concerned by the possible ramifications in terms of the sustainable management of tropical tunas in ICCAT. These stocks represent by far the majority of the catches in ICCAT and their status is preoccupying. It should therefore be a priority for all CPCs to cooperate closely towards the adoption of management measures that will ensure the sustainability of these resources. In 2020, owing to the Covid-19 pandemic, ICCAT was in the extraordinary situation of not being able to conduct its annual meeting in normal conditions. What traditionally requires difficult discussions became almost an unsurmountable task and led the Commission Chair to propose the rollover of the measures expiring in 2020 as a pragmatic solution. This approach has been endorsed by all the ICCAT members and requires all members to demonstrate enough flexibility to facilitate this process. Failing to do so would jeopardize the management of tropical tunas, the sustainability of these fisheries, and the reputation of ICCAT.

In conclusion, we would like to respectfully request that PA1-503A, including the rollover of paragraph 8 of Recommendation 19-02 and its associated footnote, be confirmed as approved by the Commission.

**Panel 2**

The European Union (EU) would like to express its gratitude to the Chair of Panel 2 for his tireless efforts and efficient management of the correspondence process for Panel 2.

The EU is pleased to support the adoption of documents PA2-606B and PA2-607C for Northern Albacore but also PA2-609B for Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean bluefin tuna. Regarding the

intersessional meeting of Panel 2, the European Union agrees with the suggested schedule under documents PA2-618-APP-1A and PA2-618-APP-2A.

Concerning Western Bluefin tuna, the EU is relieved that in the end it was possible to find an agreement, which will ensure that management measures will be in place for this important stock in 2021; the EU will therefore not block a consensus outcome on PA2-608C. However, we recall that this stock has been subject to rebuilding programs for more than two decades and based on the current assessment of the stocks status, a more precautionary and more ambitious approach will be required to ensure that such rebuilding can one day be achieved.

The EU, along with other CPCs, expressed concerns regarding the scheduling of a new assessment for WBFT in 2021. We believe that it sends the wrong message that, when faced with a difficult scientific advice, the Commission chooses to ask SCRS to revisit its work until the results are deemed acceptable. We also believe that this will impose an additional and unnecessary burden on an already overloaded SCRS. Finally, we had concerns about the impact that the scheduling of this new assessment could have for the timely completion of the MSE process for BFT. After having received the requested assurances that a new assessment for WBFT should not impede the MSE process for BFT and that the latter will remain the priority the EU agreed not to block consensus on this point. More worryingly, despite many CPCs supporting a reduction of the TAC in 2021 to a level consistent with  $F_{MSY}$ , the TAC was maintained at the current level of 2350t, which according to SCRS will result in a 94% probability of overfishing. This follows three consecutive years of overfishing, on a stock which still needs to be rebuilt. The EU would like to express its deep concerns and disappointment with this decision and wishes to underline that this is not consistent with the Convention's objectives. In the end and despite its significant concerns the EU s reluctantly agreed not to stand in the way of a consensus outcome on this stock.