

INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE CONSERVATION OF ATLANTIC TUNAS (ICCAT) VIRTUAL MEETING, NOVEMBER 15-22, 2021

The impacts of COVID-19 continue to present challenges to RFMOs in conducting meetings. Even under these challenging circumstances, ICCAT must ensure the uninterrupted, sustainable management of the tuna stocks and marine ecosystems under its purview. 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 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?

The bigeye stock was reassessed in 2021 and resulted in a more optimistic picture of stock status than the previous (2018) assessment, due in part to changes in data inputs and model assumptions. Although in 2020 the estimated catches of bigeye decreased by 24% relative to 2019 and was below the Total Allowable Catch (TAC), in the previous several years, the catches of bigeye exceeded the TAC. The catches of yellowfin have also exceeded the TAC for years, including in 2020. The TACs need to be completely allocated so that CPC-specific non-compliances can be identified. In addition, ISSF continues to be concerned with the growth of fishing capacity in the ICCAT region. Fishing fleet overcapacity increases pressure to weaken management measures, and eventually it leads to stock overexploitation.

What is ISSF asking ICCAT to do?

(1) Revise Rec. 19-02 to ensure that the bigeye and yellowfin stocks are maintained at sustainable levels and their catches are maintained within the TACs by:

- (i) Maintaining the bigeye TAC at 61,500 tonnes in line with SCRS advice.
- (ii) Adopting a precautionary yellowfin TAC that is aligned with the existing SCRS advice to be below 120,000 tonnes.
- (iii) Maintaining the current three-month Atlantic-wide FAD closure and adopting additional measures to better monitor and manage FADs.
- (iv) Agreeing on management objectives for managing the fishing mortality of juvenile vs. adult yellowfin and bigeye tunas.
- (v) Developing and adopting procedures to identify and sanction non-compliance with TAC allocations.

Our Top Asks for ICCAT:

- 1** Revise Rec. 19-02 to ensure that the bigeye and yellowfin tuna stocks are maintained at sustainable levels and catches are maintained within the TACs.
- 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, a marking scheme and ownership rules; and require FAD position and acoustic data.
- 3** Accelerate the adoption of harvest strategies for tropical tunas.
- 4** Adopt minimum standards for electronic monitoring and require 100% observer coverage (human and/or electronic) for all major ICCAT fisheries, and all vessels engaged in at-sea transshipment by 2024.
- 5** Request the Compliance Committee to address non-compliance with FAD data reporting requirements and develop audit points for ICCAT measures.

- (2) Fully allocate the TACs by fishing gear and/or CPC.
- (3) Establish limited entry through closed vessel registries, and develop a common currency to measure fishing capacity, such as cubic meters of well volume.

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 needs to be reinforced.

What is ISSF asking ICCAT to do?

- (1) Revise Rec. 19-02 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 2023.
 - (iv) Require vessels to provide complete FAD position data and acoustic records from echosounder buoys for scientific use.
 - (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; and
 - (vi) Require observer coverage on supply and tender vessels.
- (2) That 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.
- (4) Develop FAD ownership rules and definitions by 2023 to ensure FAD accountability is maintained through the end of their lifetime.
- (5) Develop clearer rules for activation and deactivation of FAD buoys.

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. The urgent adoption of harvest strategies is necessary to achieve precautionary management of Atlantic tuna stocks.

Why are we concerned?

ICCAT has been developing harvest strategies and testing them through MSE so 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.

What is ISSF asking ICCAT to do?

Accelerate the development of management strategy evaluation (MSE) for all tropical tuna stocks and adopt a harvest strategy for western Atlantic skipjack.

Bycatch and Sharks

What are the issues?

Shortfin 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 the shortfin mako shark stock 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 aimed to rebuild the North Atlantic shortfin mako shark stock that: (i) Immediately prohibits all shortfin mako retentions; and (ii) ensures specific scientific advice for minimizing incidental mortality is developed and implemented by 2022.

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, even before the Pandemic. This coverage rate should increase to 10% by 2022 for longline 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?

- (1) By 2022, develop minimum standards for an electronic monitoring (EM) program and a workplan and timeline for implementation of a comprehensive EM and electronic reporting program, including for logbooks, with emphasis on longline vessels.
- (2) Develop an ICCAT regional Observer Program (per Rec. 19-02).
- (3) Require 100% observer coverage (human and/or electronic) for all industrial ICCAT fisheries, and all vessels engaged in at-sea transshipment, by 2024.

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?

Adopt a workplan for the Compliance Committee 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 also offers [guidelines for implementing non-entangling and biodegradable FADs](#).

Three [ISSF conservation measures](#) focus on shark and bycatch mitigation.

Two [ISSF conservation measures](#) focus on FAD management.



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