



## STATEMENT for the 27<sup>th</sup> Regular meeting of the ICCAT

### Virtual, Zoom meeting 15-23 November 2021

The COVID-19 pandemic still determines considerable challenges to fisheries management in all Oceans. The current circumstances required that all ICCAT meetings scheduled in 2020 and 2021 be held virtually. WWF acknowledges the increased effort of the ICCAT Secretariat and CPCs to manage this situation and understands the need to prioritize interventions and the agenda of the 27<sup>th</sup> Regular meeting of the Commission. Below, the issues that WWF considers most critical, and that Contracting Parties and Cooperating non-Contracting Parties (CPCs) should urgently address.

#### SHORTFIN MAKO SHARK

The status of **shortfin mako shark in the North Atlantic** requires acting with no further delay. Reported catches in 2020 were significantly higher than the level recommended by the SCRS and inconsistent with the targets to recover the stock. ICCAT CPCs repeatedly failed to adopt a recovery plan for the North Atlantic stock of shortfin mako shark, while the state of the stock continues to be critical.

WWF believes that a holistic approach that would consider and tackle the different elements and threats, would result in being effective in the long term. This would include setting **catch limits aiming at gradually achieving a zero-retention policy, while at the same time introducing mechanism to improve data collection, adopt area/time-based management, technical measures on fishing gears, safe handling and best practices for the release of live specimens**. We consider all those elements to be crucial for an effective and comprehensive rebuilding plan aiming at mitigating bycatch, reducing all kinds of mortalities and increasing post-release survival. To this end, it is essential that any conservation measure is supported by robust monitoring, investments in research, effective control, surveillance and reliable reporting from CPCs.

#### KEY ASKS

- ✓ WWF urges all CPCs to spare no efforts adopting with no further delay a **comprehensive recovery plan for shortfin mako shark**, to immediately start reverting the declining trend of the stock in the North Atlantic.
- ✓ In addition and for all sharks species, WWF asks all CPCs to make further efforts to finally progress on the **adoption of a fins naturally attached policy**, following the remarkable steps forward already undertaken by NAFO (2017), GFCM (2018) and partially IOTC (2018) in this direction.

## TROPICAL TUNA STOCKS

The 2021 stock assessment of **Bigeye tuna** (*Thunnus obesus*) included significant changes in natural mortality assumptions, abundance indices and fleet structure, resulting in more optimistic estimations than the ones provided by the SCRS in 2018. Although the trend of the Bigeye stock status in the Atlantic Ocean seems to be encouraging, the existing sources of uncertainty that still undermine the stock assessment, call for a precautionary approach in changing the management measures currently in place for this stock.

Annual catches of **Yellowfin tuna** (*Thunnus albacares*) continue to be repeatedly above the TAC, including in 2020. In order to prevent overfishing of this stock, precautionary catch limits should be maintained, and a solid allocation of the TAC, adopted.

For both the East and Western Atlantic stocks of **Skipjack** (*Katsuwonus pelamis*), the last available scientific assessment dates back to 2014, showing the stocks to be likely not overfished, nor in overfishing. The unavailability of updated scientific information prevents managers from taking any decision for the management of these stocks.

### KEY ASKS

- ✓ WWF fully supports the management recommendation of the SCRS to **adopt a precautionary TAC that would shift the stock status of Bigeye tuna towards the green zone of the Kobe plot with a high probability**. Maintaining a TAC of 61,500 t is considered to be a level that allows meeting this objective with 97% of probability by 2034.
- ✓ WWF calls on CPCs to **adopt a precautionary catch limit below 110,000 t and to urgently agree on an allocation scheme for the Yellowfin tuna** stock in the Atlantic to ensure an effective monitoring system that prevents overfishing.
- ✓ WWF urges the Commission to mandate the SCRS to **update the Skipjack stock assessment** in 2022.
- ✓ **WWF supports the development of a management strategy evaluation (MSE) for stocks managed under ICCAT and urges the Commission to devote resources to fast track this process for tropical tuna**, following the path already undertaken for other temperate tuna.

## FADs MANAGEMENT

Fishing Aggregating Devices (FADs) deployed by the Atlantic purse seine fisheries, significantly contribute to the overfished state of Bigeye tuna due to its high catch of juveniles of both Bigeye and Yellowfin tuna. WWF strongly believes that the use of FADs in the Atlantic needs to be further regulated, besides the provisions of ICCAT Recommendation 19-02, to limit their impact on stocks and ecosystems.

Improved management, monitoring, compliance and transparency should include:

### KEY ASKS

- ✓ **Science-based limits on FADs use** (number, deployments and/or FAD sets) that are consistent with management objectives for tropical tunas.
- ✓ **Investigation of the impact of FAD fishing mortality on juvenile Yellowfin/Bigeye tuna** using Spawning Stock Biomass (SSB) as an indicator.
- ✓ The requirement that **all FADs be marked** in accordance with the FAO Guidelines on the marking of fishing gears for all new FAD deployments to ensure that a FAD is tracked for its entire lifetime.

- ✓ The development and implementation of **FADs ownership rules and definitions**, to ensure FADs accountability is maintained through the end of their lifetime.
- ✓ The requirement for the fleets to develop a **fully transparent FAD recovery and retrieval policy** that reduces marine debris and stranding, including through systems to alert coastal countries of derelict FADs.
- ✓ Investments in research to **identify deployment areas that are highly likely to result in stranding** on sensitive habitats and to identify areas of high incidence of stranding events and positional data on stranded FADs to enable targeted recovery.
- ✓ The requirement that the **activation of operational buoys**, as defined by the joint tuna RFMO FAD meeting in 2019, occur exclusively onboard, prior to deployment and development of clear rules for deactivation of FAD buoys at sea.
- ✓ The requirement of **near-real time reporting of electronic data on FADs** (buoy tracks and echosounders estimates of biomass) and reporting of FAD use in a standardized format to the ICCAT Secretariat and fishery authorities, ensuring independent verification and public reporting of these metrics.
- ✓ The **extension of FAD management measures to all vessels engaged in supply and tender activities**, with specific identification on the List of Authorized Vessels of what activities supply and tender vessels are engaged in, whether they are acting as bait boats, servicing FADs, or engaging in fishing.
- ✓ **100% observer coverage** (human and/or electronic), including for vessels engaged in supply and tender activities.
- ✓ Measures to **limit interactions with Endangered Threatened and Protected (ETP) species** (such as avoiding hotspots) and conduct research to develop and implement further avoidance measures on non-target species (including sea turtles) impacted by FAD fishing, including banning the use of nets in non-entangling FADs.

## MEDITERRANEAN ALBACORE

The outcome of the stock assessment for **Mediterranean albacore (*Thunnus alalunga*)** in 2021, flagged that the stock is overfished and subject to overfishing (in the red zone of the Kobe plot with 73,8% of probability).

### KEY ASKS

- ✓ WWF calls on CPCs to take action to revert the declining trend of the stock of Mediterranean albacore in time, following the scientific advice and **introduce catch limits** to reduce fishing mortality and allow the stock to recover with at least 60% of probability by 2029.

## ATLANTIC BLUEFIN TUNA

WWF acknowledges the effort of the SCRS to advance on **Bluefin tuna (*Thunnus thynnus*)** management strategy evaluation (MSE) development process in ICCAT. This is a fundamental tool to manage both stocks of the Atlantic and Mediterranean in the long term, that should be adopted with no delay.

Proposals to improve control measures for the trade of live bluefin tuna were delayed in 2020 due to the impact that Covid-19 had on the Commission meeting last year. Considering the progress made in the

intersessional work this year, we call on CPCs to agree on key additional measures to strengthen controls for the trade of live bluefin tuna, especially regarding farming activities.

#### KEY ASKS

- ✓ WWF urges the Commission to allocate all the needed resources to ensure the **adoption of an interim Management Procedure (MP)** at the annual meeting of the Commission in 2022, according to the roadmap of the Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) discussed this year.
- ✓ WWF urges CPCs to agree on additional **control measures to strengthen Recommendation 19-04, especially regarding the trade of live bluefin tuna and farming activities.**

## MEDITERRANEAN SWORDFISH

The first stock assessment run in June 2020, after the implementation of Recommendation 16-05, highlighted the concerning picture of significant gaps in catch reports, especially for juveniles that are caught below the minimum catch size and are largely discarded dead at sea, with very limited information returned to the system for effective management. Despite the scarcity of data, the estimation that scientists provided is that the mortality of undersized fish is about 24% of the total catches, representing a real threat to the effectiveness of the rebuilding plan itself.

#### KEY ASKS

- ✓ WWF urges ICCAT CPCs to take action to effectively **minimize juvenile mortality, improve fisheries' traceability and reporting**, to secure the recovery of this stock.

## TRANSPARENCY AND ANTI-IUU MEASURES

WWF calls on ICCAT CPCs to support the following measures to foster transparency, improve monitoring and tackle IUU fishing for all ICCAT fisheries.

#### KEY ASKS

- ✓ Strengthen the implementation of Recommendation 06-14, in order to **prevent CPCs nationals from deriving benefits from or supporting IUU fishing.**
- ✓ Targeted amendment of Recommendation 13-13, to ensure that all eligible fishing vessels above 12 meters have an **IMO number** in line with international best practices and with the latest IMO eligibility criteria.
- ✓ **Strengthen transshipments oversight and management** through amending Recommendation 16-15, to clarify reporting requirements, mandating centralized VMS reporting, and strengthening controls on supply and non-CPC carrier vessels.
- ✓ **Increase observer coverage** on longlines by at least 10% of active vessels by 2022, with the target to increase to at least 20% by 2024, in accordance with the SCRS advice to reach this level to adequately monitor longline fisheries for scientific purposes.
- ✓ Develop a **Regional Observer Program for tropical tuna fisheries.**