



STATEMENT

for the 23rd Special meeting of the ICCAT Commission

Vale do Lobo, Portugal

14-21 November 2022

Hybrid

WWF would like to thank for the opportunity to participate in the 23rd Special meeting of the Commission with a hybrid format this year. Although the restrictions to limit COVID infections have been reduced significantly in many countries, some of the measures to attend international meetings in person still remain. Progress made over the past three years in running remote meetings and the positive trend towards the resumption of in person meetings and full participation of delegates and observers, is key to continue advancing tuna fisheries sustainability and marine life conservation in the Atlantic Ocean.

On the occasion of the 23rd Special meeting of the Commission, WWF calls on Contracting Parties and Cooperating non-Contracting Parties (CPCs) to agree on important measures that can significantly improve tuna fisheries' management in the Convention area. WWF considers the following priorities as essential milestones for this year's meeting.

TROPICAL TUNA

The 2022 stock assessment of the East and West Atlantic skipjack stocks, gave a positive picture of the stock status that was confirmed to be not overfished and not in overfishing as was last assessed back in 2014. Reported catches of tropical tunas in the Atlantic in 2021 show a decreasing trend, with Bigeye catches still below the TAC, while Yellowfin catches are confirmed to be above the limits.

While the overall decrease of catches is encouraging to maintain healthy stocks, overshooting of TAC needs to be avoided in the future and effective monitoring of all catches needs to be ensured through full quota allocation.

KEY ASKS

- ✓ WWF fully supports the adoption of a precautionary **TAC for Bigeye tuna that would shift the stock status towards the green zone of the Kobe plot with a high probability through 2034**. According to the scientific advice, maintaining a TAC around 70.000 t is considered to be a level that allows meeting this objective with more than 70% of probability.
- ✓ WWF calls on CPCs to **adopt a precautionary catch limit below 120,000 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.
- ✓ Adopt harvest strategy precautionary **management objectives for western Atlantic skipjack**
- ✓ WWF recommends to **maintain the FAD management measures currently in place**, with no further reduction of the FAD closure period (maintain at least 72 days closure) or increase in number of FAD per vessel (maintain the limit of 300 FAD). The current management framework is delivering good results in reducing mortality, especially regarding juveniles of Bigeye and Yellowfin tuna.
- ✓ Develop a **Regional Observer Program for tropical tuna fisheries**.
- ✓ 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**, confirming the roadmap for the adoption of Management Procedures already implemented for other temperate stocks in the Atlantic.

FAD MANAGEMENT

Fishing Aggregating Devices (FAD) deployed by the Atlantic purse seine fisheries, significantly contributed to the overfished state of Bigeye tuna due to the high catch rate of juveniles of both Bigeye and Yellowfin tuna. The current framework adopted with the ICCAT Rec. 21-01, provides a set of management measures that contributes to reducing the impact of FADs on the ecosystem.

However, WWF believes that the use of FADs in the Atlantic needs to be further regulated, mostly to minimize tropical tuna juvenile mortality and to limit their impact on stocks and the ecosystem.

KEY ASKS

- ✓ Require only fully **non-entangling FAD designs** without netting or other meshed materials.

- ✓ Establish a timeline for transitioning to **100% biodegradable FADs**.
- ✓ Require the **timely provision of all FAD data** necessary to confirm/validate the implementation and assess the impact of the FAD closure in 2023.
- ✓ Require the provision of **near real-time FAD position and acoustic records data** for scientific knowledge and use.
- ✓ Develop a fully transparent **FAD-recovery policy, a FAD marking scheme, clearer rules for FAD ownership and stronger rules for activation and deactivation of FAD buoys**.

ATLANTIC BLUEFIN TUNA

WWF acknowledges the remarkable effort of the SCRS to advance the Bluefin tuna (*Thunnus thynnus*) Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) process in ICCAT. This is a fundamental tool to manage Bluefin tuna fisheries and ensure stability of a stock that suffered heavy overfishing in the recent past.

With the adoption of a Management Procedure this year, ICCAT has the opportunity to make significant progress on the long-term management of Bluefin tuna in the Atlantic and Mediterranean, advancing on the roadmap for the implementation of MSE for priority stocks identified with ICCAT Rec. 15-07.

KEY ASKS

- ✓ WWF calls on CPCs to **adopt a Management Procedure (MP) for Atlantic Bluefin tuna** this year, set a TAC based on the MP and mandate the SCRS to work in 2023 to assess and identify exceptional circumstances, according to the roadmap for the development of the Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) and Harvest Control Rules (HCR) in ICCAT.

SHARKS

The adoption of Recommendation 21-09 establishing a comprehensive rebuilding program for the endangered shortfin mako shark in the North Atlantic was a cornerstone to immediately stop the dramatic decline of the stock and start recovery. It is now imperative to focus on the implementation of the plan, mitigation of interactions to reduce total mortality and reporting of all catches, including discards.

In September 2022 the CITES EU Scientific Review Group issued a negative opinion for the Non Detrimental Finding to land shortfin mako shark caught in the South Atlantic, similarly to the decision taken by the same group in 2021 for the North Atlantic stock.

KEY ASKS

- ✓ WWF calls on CPCs to adopt an ICCAT Recommendation to **extend the shortfin mako shark rebuilding plan to the South Atlantic and implement a prohibition of retaining** shortfin mako shark of the South Atlantic for 2023 and 2024 as a first step to immediately stop overfishing and start rebuilding of this stock and incentivize effective monitoring and reporting of all catches.
- ✓ For all sharks species, WWF asks all CPCs to make further efforts to finally overtake blocking positions for the **adoption of a fins naturally attached policy**, following the remarkable steps forward already undertaken by other RFMOs such as NAFO (2017), GFCM (2018) and partially IOTC (2018).
- ✓ **Increase the observer coverage** (human and/or electronic) to **100%** for all industrial ICCAT fisheries, including supporting vessels and all those engaged in at sea transshipment, to drastically improve data collection on all shark mortalities (retentions and discards) and ensure compliance with CITES measures.
- ✓ Introduce measures aimed at reducing mortality due to interactions with the fishing gear, such as **prohibiting wire leaders**, shark lines and other catch mitigation techniques to immediately reduce the mortality rate of pelagic sharks, in particular of shortfin mako shark in the North Atlantic, as mortality rates for 2021 was still estimated 6 fold above the recommended advice.

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 was 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.
- ✓ Mandate the **SCRS to clearly assess the juvenile mortality** rate for Mediterranean swordfish and implications on the recovery of the stock.
- ✓ Ensure **compliance with ICCAT Recommendation 03-04** that prohibits the use of **driftnets** for fisheries of large pelagics in the Mediterranean.

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

- ✓ Accelerate the development of Electronic Monitoring Systems through the adoption of minimum standards for an electronic monitoring program, including those recommended by the SCRS in 2022, and a timeline for the implementation by 2023 of an **ICCAT Electronic Monitoring Program**.
- ✓ Require **100% observer coverage** (human and/or electronic) for all industrial ICCAT fisheries, including supporting vessels and all those engaged in at sea transshipment.
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ **Align Recommendation 18-09 on an ICCAT Scheme for Minimum Standards for Inspections in Port with best-practices standards and the FAO Agreement on Port State Measures** by: (i) outlining minimum standards for inspector functions; (ii) outlining minimum standards for inspection reports; and (iii) Requiring all inspection reports to be transmitted to flag State of the vessel and relevant States and parties, such as other RFMOs and FAO.
- ✓ Expanding the coverage of **electronic Catch Documentation Schemes (eCDS)** to cover all stocks managed under the Convention.