

**2022: 23rd SPECIAL MEETING OF ICCAT –
OPENING STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN UNION**

The European Union is looking forward to the 23rd Special Meeting of ICCAT, the first one for two years to take place with in-person participation, even if still limited. The EU welcomes this hybrid meeting format and hopes that it will provide an opportunity to address some pressing ICCAT issues. With the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic being less serious than in previous years – albeit unfortunately still present - the 2022 hybrid format allows for a limited number of participants to meet in one venue and others to attend online. We believe that this format represents a much-welcomed improvement on the last two years, and we look forward to fruitful discussions, finding solutions on some long outstanding issues and taking ambitious management decisions.

The EU stands ready to work with all CPCs to further strengthen ICCAT's governance through better science-based decisions, stronger control and enforcement measures and better compliance by its members. Having in mind the difficult conditions that have existed since the start of the pandemic, the increasing number of meetings and organisational challenges, we would also like to thank the ICCAT Secretariat for the preparation of this 23rd Special Meeting and for their hard work throughout 2022.

With respect to management measures for fish stocks, the EU considers that there are several priority areas where decisions need to be taken this year.

A key priority for EU this year is the adoption of the **Management Procedure for the Bluefin tuna** stocks. After years of research, analysis, modelling and testing, adoption of a Management Procedure will make the management framework more transparent, inclusive and robust. It will allow for an inclusion of recent scientific knowledge of Bluefin tuna reproduction and migration across the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. The EU has been supporting the development of Management Strategy Evaluation from the very beginning. We have been contributing in an unprecedented manner to the ICCAT Atlantic-Wide Research Programme for Bluefin Tuna programme ('GBYP') for over 13 years. We have been supporting this project, both by the EU's substantial voluntary financial contributions and through the considerable involvement of the EU scientists. After all the efforts invested over years all eyes will be on the ICCAT discussions this year and expectation will therefore be high. The adoption of Bluefin tuna Management Procedure this year must therefore be a priority for the organisation and its adoption would send a strong signal of its commitment to ensure sustainable fisheries and a healthy status of the two Bluefin tuna stocks.

After several years of discussions between the ICCAT CPCs, the EU also believes that it is high time for ICCAT to reach, at this meeting, a consensus on comprehensive management measures for fisheries harvesting **Tropical Tunas** stocks. This remains one of the greatest

challenges and should be one of the ICCAT priorities for 2022. While gradual improvements have been made over recent years, further and much needed progress has been hampered since the start of the pandemic. It is, therefore, necessary to adopt a realistic, yet ambitious approach and to address the most pressing issues regarding the management of these important resources. With this in mind, the EU presented its position during the June and October intersessional meetings of Panel 1 just as it has presented for this meeting a proposed methodology for allocation fishing opportunities. We believe that the following elements are an essential part of any package to be agreed this year:

- Total Allowable Catch (TAC) should be in line with the results of the 2021 stock assessment for bigeye tuna and follow a normal cautious approach as regards the probability of staying in the green zone of the Kobe II plot during the management period.
- An increased TAC will allow for a fair and more equitable allocation amongst CPCs, in favour of developing coastal states;
- A new management measure must be comprehensive and ensure that the agreed TAC can be properly implemented which among other things means that most CPCs must be included in the allocation table
- Fishing capacity should remain commensurate with fishing opportunities so as to achieve sustainable productive fisheries;
- Moreover, the EU cannot accept a measure that would allow for the transfer of fishing opportunities intended for the development of local fisheries in developing coastal states;
- The consolidation of the measures adopted in 2019 for the better management of FADs;
- Provisions to address the relative weakness of control regime currently in place, including the establish a regional observer programme.

The adoption of a recovery plan for the North Atlantic shortfin mako was a major achievement of the 2021 ICCAT annual meeting. There are indications from the scientists of a significant risk that the South Atlantic shortfin mako is following a similar path. If this stock declines, it will - like the Northern stock - require a long time for rebuilding, even after significant catch reductions. Therefore, the EU submitted a proposal for the conservation of the South Atlantic stock of shortfin mako based on the model put in place for the North Atlantic stock.

This year, the SCRS conducted an evaluation of the North and **South Atlantic Swordfish**. With respect to the South Atlantic stock, the SCRS noted concern regarding the status of the stock and advised that catches at their current levels will accelerate rebuilding of the stock. Therefore, the EU has tabled a proposal ensuring that those levels are not crossed and, should they be crossed, that adequate measures are adopted by ICCAT.

Moreover, the EU has proposed a measure aiming at reducing by-catch and increasing post-release survival of **sea turtles** responding to the reports on high annual rates of by-catch of sea turtles in ICCAT longline fisheries. Echoing similar measures taken by other regional fisheries management organisations, such as the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission and Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission, ICCAT needs to consider adopting mitigation measures for shallow-set longline fisheries.

Finally, following up on the measure adopted in 2021 on a rebuilding plan for **Mediterranean Albacore**, the EU hopes this meeting will facilitate agreement on the allocation among all the CPCs concerned.

The EU is pleased with the continuous developments towards better science, including the critical Management Strategy Evaluation processes being undertaken and the management of very significant research programs, such as the already mentioned GBYP, for which the EU continues to provide substantial financial and scientific contributions. We are also the main contributors to the development of the Integrated Online Management System (IOMS) system. In order to secure the long-term future of these crucial programs, we would urge ICCAT CPCs to identify sustainable financing mechanisms, not relying on voluntary contributions.

Moreover, in view of the increasing workload of the ICCAT Secretariat, in particular since the start of the pandemic, we are of the view that there is a need for the STACFAD to discuss and to take a serious look at the Secretariat's workload and funding.

As in the past, the EU continues to attach a great importance to the compliance process. This process is crucial to ensure that the conservation measures adopted in ICCAT deliver efficiently on their objectives. We are committed to ensuring that ICCAT maintains a strong commitment to the compliance review and assessment, and we are confident that this process will continue to be guided by a solution-oriented and pragmatic approach in order to further enable ICCAT to live up to its global mission.

The EU is looking forward to working constructively with all CPCs in order to achieve these ambitious goals at the 23rd Special Meeting of ICCAT.