

**OPENING STATEMENT
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

The United States extends its gratitude to the European Union and the Government of Portugal for their gracious hosting of the 23rd Special Meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT). We welcome the return to a format that allows for in-person attendance, which is made all the more special by the lovely setting here in Vale do Lobo, Portugal. We are sincerely grateful to the Executive Secretary and his staff for the time and effort spent preparing for this hybrid meeting and all of the intersessional meetings that preceded it. Below, the United States highlights a few of our priorities that we look forward to progressing together with other CPCs this year during ICCAT.

Earlier this month, the United States tabled a proposal on climate change. Climate change is the issue of our time, and ICCAT must not fail to prepare for the challenges it will bring. This is imperative, particularly given the changes we are beginning to observe in our respective fisheries. We have already received very positive feedback from other CPCs with respect to this measure, and we look forward to its adoption and to starting the important work contemplated within it.

ICCAT will also consider the adoption of a management procedure for bluefin tuna based on testing through management strategy evaluation (MSE). This tool will allow the Commission to manage bluefin tuna more effectively in the face of identified uncertainties and more clearly evaluate management tradeoffs. We welcome this important development and congratulate the SCRS on the massive efforts that got us to this point. We also welcome the work underway to prepare the new MSE for North Atlantic swordfish. As we await that, and in view of the outcome of the 2022 stock assessment, we have proposed a simple one-year rollover of the existing rules for that fishery. We are hopeful there can be speedy adoption of this proposal during this meeting.

Panel 1 has been seeking agreement on a new, comprehensive tropical tuna conservation and management measure for four years now. We cannot continue to delay adoption of a balanced, strong, and effective management measure for these fisheries, and it is critical that the Panel cooperate with the Panel 1 Chair to work toward a successful conclusion of these negotiations. These stocks support a critically important fishery for the United States; any new measure must take this into account while ensuring the sustainability of the resource into the future.

In Panel 4, we have retabled important proposals to (1) require sharks be landed with their fins naturally attached, which would strengthen catch and landings data and simplify the enforcement of ICCAT's ban on shark finning; and (2) mitigate the impact of ICCAT shallow-set longline fisheries on threatened and endangered sea turtles, using methods recommended by the Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS). ICCAT has delayed action on these two measures for too long, and we hope we can find a way past our differences and do the right thing for these species.

This is only a short list of the issues ICCAT will be facing during its 2022 Annual Meeting. Important proposals have also been tabled on conservation and management of South Atlantic shortfin mako; western Atlantic bluefin tuna, South Atlantic swordfish; monitoring, control, and surveillance matters, including control of nationals and an international joint inspection scheme; management objectives to support the western skipjack MSE; and more. We have a substantial workload this week, but with goodwill and flexibility from all CPCs, we believe ICCAT can successfully address the important issues before it this year.

The United States looks forward to constructive dialogue with all ICCAT parties at this meeting, whether in the room or online, to achieve successful outcomes on these pressing issues.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.