

**Explanatory note on the Draft Recommendation by ICCAT
for a pilot project for farming bluefin tuna (*Thunnus thynnus*) in the Cantabrian Sea**

(submitted by the European Union)

Background

The aim of the project is to develop bluefin tuna fattening in the Cantabrian Sea, an activity that has not been previously undertaken due to the nature of the existing vessels and fishing gear, as well as the challenging conditions of this sea, particularly during the autumn and winter.

The baitboat fleet has been fishing for bluefin tuna for decades, targeting mainly juvenile fish. In recent years, the low value of juvenile catches on the market has led these vessels to temporarily hand over their quotas to Mediterranean purse seiners for fattening purposes.

Although these same vessels fish with purse seine gear for other species like sardine, anchovy, etc., this fishing gear has never been adapted for fishing bluefin tuna in the Cantabrian Sea.

The transfer of quotas has resulted in a weakness within the fishing sector, leading to an absence of economic, social, and labour activity in the ports and along the coasts of the Cantabrian Sea. Additionally, the lack of landings means that certain markets remain undersupplied.

BFT farming activities have not been yet tested in the Cantabrian Sea, an area with specific climatic and marine conditions very different from the Mediterranean, where this activity has been carried out.

If this activity proves to be viable, scaling it up is expected to yield solutions that provide stable, secure, and high-quality jobs. This will involve introducing a high-added-value product to the market and ensuring an alignment between supply and demand.

The purpose of the project is to:

- Experiment with farming activity in the Cantabrian Sea. Farming of bluefin tuna with the purpose of carrying out fattening activity is limited to the Mediterranean, apart from two farms in the open sea in the south of Portugal, however with substantial hydrodynamic conditions as compared to the Cantabrian Sea.
- Experiment with the use of submersible cages for bluefin tuna fattening, and, in case it proves successful, escalate to commercial activity and transfer this innovation to other areas or activities in the future.
- Assess BFT fattening and growth rates and assess whether the activity is profitable.
- Develop purse seine fishing for bluefin tuna for fattening purposes with submersible cages.
- Potentiate the increase in added value of the fishery product.
- Assess the viability of developing a fishery that targets medium to large-sized fish in the Cantabrian Sea (average 100 kg) instead of catching juvenile fish.

The operationalisation of the project builds on the premise that the submersible cages must allow the fattening activity, despite the weather conditions that may occur during the fattening period.

Public research institutes will participate in the development of the project, with the aim of improving knowledge of the species, and of the processes and treatment received by the specimens during fattening.

The project should also serve to test the suitability of this activity for the relevant provisions of Rec. 22-08 and to check that control can be carried out from an operational point of view.

Current ICCAT provisions, Para 28 Rec. 22-08, do not cater for purse seine fishing in the Cantabrian Sea later in the year from 15 June to 30 September, when the adult BFT individuals migrate back towards northern grounds.

At the end of the project, a scientific, technical and control analysis will be carried out to evaluate the viability of the activity in the future.

Request to Panel 2

Panel 2 is requested to authorize a one-year exploratory activity in the Cantabrian Sea as part of a pilot project. This activity will take place during a later period compared to the purse seine open season, aligning more closely with the purse seine fishing season in the Norwegian Economic Zone and the Icelandic Economic Zone, running from June 15 to September 30. The goal is to assess the viability of the activity and, if the project yields positive results, to consider its expansion to a commercial scale soon.

Pending the results of the pilot project, an amendment to Rec. 22-08 can be pursued to establish the necessary conditions for this commercial activity to take place in the region and during the relevant period of the year.

**Draft Recommendation by ICCAT for a pilot project for
farming bluefin tuna (*Thunnus thynnus*) in the Cantabrian Sea**

(submitted by the European Union)

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT that ICCAT has adopted the *Recommendation by ICCAT amending the Recommendation 21-08 establishing a Multi-Annual Management Plan for bluefin tuna in the Eastern Atlantic and the Mediterranean* (Rec. 22-08), the *Recommendation by ICCAT amending Recommendation 21-18 on the application of the eBCD system* (Rec. 22-16) and the *Recommendation by ICCAT amending Recommendation 18-13 replacing Recommendation 11-20 on an ICCAT bluefin tuna catch documentation program* (Rec. 21-19);

RECALLING that in its 23rd Special Meeting the ICCAT Commission adopted a BFT management procedure (Rec. 22-09) intended to secure sustainable management of the bluefin tuna fishery, and provide stability and predictability for the BFT fishing activity, including for the farming sector;

NOTING an interest in exploring ways to (a) farm bluefin tuna in areas other than in the Mediterranean (b) explore technological innovation for caging and farming bluefin tuna, and (c) assess the feasibility of implementing the current provision on monitoring farming operation when the farm is operating in open ocean conditions;

ACKNOWLEDGING that the results of research to be undertaken on Cantabrian purse seine fishing and farming of bluefin tuna in the Cantabrian Sea could indicate the need for adjustments to relevant ICCAT measures, or the development of new ones, including the need to include additional rules to the fishing season accordingly, and/or adding or revisiting current provisions related to the monitoring and control measures of the farming activities outside the Mediterranean Sea.

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE CONSERVATION
OF ATLANTIC TUNAS (ICCAT) RECOMMENDS THAT:

1. The objective of the pilot project for farming bluefin tuna (*Thunnus thynnus*) (BFT) in the Cantabrian Sea is to assess the conditions for fishing and farming bluefin tuna in the Cantabrian Sea to inform the potential future development of such activities.
2. Research conducted as part of the pilot project should aim to provide answers to key questions related to fishing and farming of BFT in the Cantabrian Sea including, but not limited to, the following:
 - Assessing the functioning of technological developments of the submersible cages under extreme weather conditions.
 - Assessing that suitable schools (medium large fish) are available to purse seine vessels, in that area during the months July to November.
 - Assessing the growth and fattening of BFT in this area and exploring the potential added value of the activity, including in terms of direct fisher profits.
 - Assessing whether the monitoring and control of fishing, transfer and farming activities laid down by ICCAT Recommendation 22-08 are adequate and feasible to implement.
3. The pilot project shall be carried out on a limited scale, over one year, with a limited number of individuals (i.e. 50 BFT fish).
4. Notwithstanding paragraph 28 of Rec. 22-08, the fishing season for this pilot project may be extended to 30 September.
5. The precise details of the pilot project shall be included in the 2024 annual fishing, farming and inspection plans established in accordance with paragraph 10 of ICCAT Recommendation 22-08.

6. The allocation from the CPC's national quota to the pilot project shall be specified in the annual fishing plan and shall be on a limited scale and approved by Panel 2.
7. This plan shall also include details of the control measures to be put in place to ensure that the activity is carried out in line with ICCAT rules and with this Recommendation, as well as the way these rules shall be made mandatory for operators. The plan shall be analysed, and, as appropriate, endorsed by Panel 2 intersessionally (Rec. 22-08, paragraph 11).
8. The results of the pilot project shall be assessed by the Commission in 2024 to determine, in case the project delivers positive results, whether and how the commercial activity could take place beyond the pilot project stage.
9. CPCs participating in the pilot project shall submit a report on the results of the project for consideration by the Standing Committee on Research and Statistics and the Commission no later than the end of 2024. The report shall provide detailed information on the key questions mentioned in paragraph 2 above, as well as relevant statistical data, including the final number of BFT caught/caged and the individual length and weight of those fish at the time of capture and at the time of harvest from the cage. The report shall also identify the challenges or difficulties encountered, including regarding data collection and monitoring, control, and surveillance. In particular, the report shall include an analysis of the suitability of the current ICCAT provisions for this activity.