

Opening statement by Japan to the Plenary

On behalf of the Japanese Delegation, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt for hosting this important meeting in this booming city, New Cairo, notwithstanding the recent difficult situation. I also thank the ICCAT Secretariat staff for the excellent preparation and arrangement of the 28th Regular Meeting of the Commission.

From 2020 to 2021, the Commission was unable to hold its annual meeting in person due to the global pandemic, and as a result, many important management measures were rolled over. Although the Commission restarted holding an in-person meeting last year, there are still many outstanding issues therefore, the importance of this meeting cannot be overemphasized.

The Commission this year needs to tackle one of the most difficult negotiations, management measures for tropical tunas, particularly bigeye tuna. While the stock assessment of bigeye in 2021 showed somewhat optimistic results including the potential increase of TAC, the introduction of management schemes to keep the total catch below the TAC remains urgent. Such schemes should include addressing the growing aspirations of developing CPCs. The potential increase of the TAC can be used for this purpose. Furthermore, in order to further increase the TAC for accommodating the interests of developing CPCs, it is essential to reduce the catch of juvenile fish and improve the productivity of tropical tunas, including through stronger management of FADs. With these in mind, Japan, together with the co-sponsors, has put the proposal for tropical tuna management measures on the table. Japan wishes to cooperate with the Chairpersons and other CPCs to find common ground on this important issue.

There is one thing Japan would like to stress as to catch limits. Some CPCs consider and actually propose that the catch limit of Japan should and could be reduced drastically based on the recent catch record. While it is true that Japan did not fully utilize its catch limit for several years due to various reasons, Japan's catch has been recovering in the last couple of years. In addition, when Japan did not fully utilize the catch limit, the bigeye stock status was in a bad shape. Japan believes that under-utilization of the catch limit when the stock was overfished should be appreciated, not penalized. In this regard, Japan and co-sponsors propose that if a CPC does not fully utilize the catch limit in the future, such CPC shall give up part of the catch limit.

Attempts to strengthen the traceability of tuna species and improve transparency in tuna fisheries are also important. This year's Commission is expected to decide to expand the Catch Document Scheme (CDS). Japan has submitted the proposal for the establishment of a standing CDS working group and hopes that the Commission will adopt this proposal at this meeting. We sincerely encourage as many CPCs as possible to participate in future working groups and provide their insights on the expansion of the CDS.

Last but not least, Japan strongly encourages other CPCs to expedite their respective internal acceptance procedures for the Protocol to amend the ICCAT Convention so that this Protocol will enter into force as soon as possible.

Japan is ready to work together with other distinguished delegations and sincerely wishes for a successful and fruitful conclusion to this meeting.