



WWF STATEMENT

NOVEMBER 2023

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28th Regular Meeting of the ICCAT Commission

WWF is pleased to participate as Observer in the 28th Regular Meeting of the Commission in New Cairo (Egypt) from 13-20 November, this year with an hybrid format. Effective fisheries management is a key component to continue progressing on tuna fisheries sustainability and marine life conservation. WWF considers the following priorities as essential milestones for this year's meeting and calls on Contracting Parties and Cooperating non-Contracting Parties (CPCs) to make all the efforts to find consensus and make progress on fisheries sustainability in the Atlantic Ocean.

Tropical tuna

While the last stock assessment in 2019 indicated that Yellowfin tuna in the Atlantic is not overfished and overfishing is not taking place, catches since then have regularly exceeded TAC. In 2022, landings were almost 35% above the catch limits. The current catch limit of 120,000 t is still not allocated to CPCs, with significant impact on the monitoring system.

The ICCAT Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS) assessed in 2021 the stock of Bigeye tuna to be overfished, with a current level of catches indicating that overfishing is not taking place. In 2022 yield was below MSY, with the stock status likely to be moving towards the green zone of the Kobe plot.

The 2022 stock assessment of the East and West Atlantic stocks of skipjack, gave a positive picture of the stock status indicating the stock not to be overfished and not in overfishing, and confirming the result assessed back in 2014. The Western stock was the first tropical tuna stock to go through a Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) process that was concluded successfully this year.

KEY ASKS

- ✓ 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. Considering the overshooting of catch limits constantly occurring, WWF asks the Commission to mandate the SCRS to schedule a full stock assessment for Yellowfin tuna in 2024.
- ✓ 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 asks the Commission to adopt this year a Management Procedure (MP) for the Western Atlantic stock of **skipjack**.

- ✓ WWF asks the Commission to mandate the working group on Integrated Monitoring Measures (IMM) to develop a **Regional Observer Program** for tropical tuna, taking into account the need for harmonisation and coordination of different national programs.
- ✓ In discussing a new Recommendation for tropical tuna conservation, WWF recommends maintaining the **FAD management measures** currently in place, with no further reduction of the FAD closure period (maintaining at least 72 days closure) or increase in number of FADs per vessel (maintaining the limit of 300 FAD). To deliver effective reduction of the impact of FADs to marine habitats and wildlife, WWF asks to adopt a timeline for a transition towards fully non-entangling and biodegradable materials, in line with progresses made in other tuna RFMOs such as IATTC and WCPFC. Finally, to adopt a fully transparent FAD-recovery policy, a FAD marking scheme, clear rules for FAD ownership and for activation/deactivation of FAD buoys.

Swordfish

The status of **Atlantic swordfish** was last assessed by the SCRS in 2022. The total estimated catch for the two stocks (North and South Atlantic) was significantly lower than the current TAC. While the North Atlantic stock was assessed to be not overfished and overfishing not taking place, the Southern stocks is still subject to overfishing and overfished.

The first stock assessment in June 2020, after the implementation of Recommendation 16-05, for a recovery plan for **Mediterranean swordfish**, highlighted the concerning picture of significant gaps in catch reports, especially for juveniles that are caught below the minimum landing 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 and triggering illegal trade of undersized specimens in the region.

KEY ASKS

- ✓ WWF asks the Commission to adopt a **Management Procedure (MP)** for swordfish in the North Atlantic that was developed and tested by the working group and that the TAC be set based on that MP, for 2024 and beyond.
- ✓ WWF urges the Commission to follow scientific advice and **lower the current TAC** set at 14,000 t for swordfish in the South Atlantic to around 10,000 t in 2024 and beyond to accelerate rebuilding. Maintaining the current level of catches will result in a very low probability (around 3%) for the stock to being in the green quadrant of the Kobe plot by 2033.
- ✓ WWF urges the Commission to mandate the SCRS to clearly assess **Mediterranean swordfish juvenile mortality** and the implications on the recovery of the stock. ICCAT must then take urgent action to effectively minimize juvenile mortality, to secure the recovery of Mediterranean swordfish. Reporting and traceability should also be improved as well as ensuring compliance with ICCAT Recommendation 03-04 that prohibits the use of driftnets for fisheries targeting large pelagics in the Mediterranean.

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 stop the decline of the stock and start recovery. Although for 2022 retention was not allowed, reported catches, landings and discards, in the North Atlantic were still above 800 t, and the estimated fishing mortality including dead discards and post-release mortalities continues to exceed the acceptable fishing mortality that would allow rebuilding the stock. The SCRS also noted that the reporting of dead discards and live releases need to be improved significantly.

WWF acknowledges and welcomes the adoption of Recommendation 22-11 on the conservation of the **South Atlantic stock of shortfin mako shark** caught in association with ICCAT fisheries. It is now imperative to focus on the implementation of the plans, mitigation of interactions to reduce total mortality and reporting of all catches, including discards.

In 2023 the SCRS assessed the status of **blue shark** in the North and South Atlantic and advised that the current TAC for both stocks need to be reduced significantly to ensure a high probability of maintaining the stocks in the green quadrant of the Kobe plot.

KEY ASKS

- ✓ Maintain the current TAC of zero for shortfin mako sharks. In addition, introduce measures aimed at **reducing pelagic sharks 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 for which current mortalities still exceed a level that would allow rebuilding the stock, noting also that the catches consist mostly of juveniles with a higher risk of at haul and post-release mortality.
- ✓ WWF asks the Commission to revise the current **TAC for the North Atlantic stock of blue shark**, following scientific advice and reducing the current catch limits to levels that will maintain the stock in the green quadrant of the Kobe plot with a high probability. The current yield reported in 2022 is 22,052 t. WWF notes that with this level of catches there will be more than 95% of probabilities to achieve the management objectives by 2033.
- ✓ WWF asks the Commission to reduce the **TAC for the South Atlantic stock of blue shark**. A TAC set at around 25,000 t will ensure to meet the management objectives with a probability higher than 60%. Recognizing the urgency to tackle consistent overfishing of the Southern stock, WWF calls on the Commission to agree on a TAC allocation this year.
- ✓ For all shark species, WWF asks all CPCs to make further efforts to finally overtake the 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).
- ✓ Following recent progress made in IOTC and WCPCF, adopt the proposal PA4-808 to prohibit retaining onboard, transshipping, landing, storing, selling or offering for sale any part or whole carcass of all species of **manta or mobulid rays** (family Mobulidae) taken in the Convention area in association with ICCAT Fisheries, and ensure, to the extent practicable, their prompt promptly release unharmed.

- ✓ Adopt the proposal PA4-806 to prohibit the retention on board, transshipping or landing, in whole or in part, any specimen of **whale shark** (*Rhincodon typus*) caught in ICCAT fisheries, and to prohibit the setting of purse seines on a school of tuna associated with a whale shark, and ensure that all reasonable steps are taken to ensure its safe release when accidentally encircled in a purse seine net.

Fleets management and monitoring

The fishing fleet operating in the Atlantic Ocean is growing constantly and overcapacity represents a major risk factor for the overexploitation of fish stocks.

Observer coverage and electronic monitoring is essential to ensure effective fisheries management, compliance and reporting. The current minimum of 10% coverage for Atlantic longline vessels does not provide a sufficient level of confidence to ensure effective monitoring and independent verification of fishing operations at sea.

KEY ASKS

- ✓ WWF asks the Commission to agree on a mechanism to limit the capacity of the fishing fleet operating in the Atlantic Ocean through the adoption of closed vessel registries and to harmonize the metrics to measure capacity of different fleets.
- ✓ WWF asks the Commission to require that all industrial fisheries, including supporting vessels and all those engaged in at sea transshipment are covered by **100% observer coverage** (human and/or electronic) and adopt electronic monitoring program standards and a timeline for implementation by 2025.
- ✓ WWF asks the Commission to revise ICCAT Recommendation 21-15 to strengthen the regulation of **at-sea transshipment** requiring a near real-time electronic reporting, carrier vessels to be only flagged to ICCAT CPCs and that AIS data are reported in addition to VMS data.

For more information

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