

**Position paper on the bluefin tuna discussion at the  
2024 ICCAT Annual Meeting  
Contribution to Panel 2, Agenda X**

*(proposal submitted by the European Union)*

## Background

At the 23rd Special Meeting of the Commission in 2022, following the agreement on the bluefin tuna management procedure and the adoption of the three-year Total Allowable Catch (TAC) (2023-2025), some ICCAT CPCs triggered a discussion on the bluefin tuna allocation key.

The Panel 2 Chair agreed to include additional time for discussion during the intersessional Panel 2 meeting to allow all CPCs to voice their viewpoints. Since then, the allocation of bluefin tuna has remained a permanent Agenda item in Panel 2, both intersessionally (in the 2023 and 2024 intersessional meetings) as well as at the Annual Meeting (in 2023 and again this year).

The EU has consistently argued that the elements and arguments brought forward to justify a revision of the TAC allocation lack a sufficient basis in facts. At the Intersessional Meeting of Panel 2 (7-10 March 2023), the EU tabled a discussion paper presenting the rationale for its position and rebutting the points made by other CPCs up to that point (document PA2\_19/i2023) notably by reinstating that:

1. the only legal basis for any bluefin tuna allocation key was agreed in the Recommendation by ICCAT amending the *Recommendation by ICCAT amending the Recommendation 13-07 to establish a multi-annual recovery plan for bluefin tuna in the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean* (Rec. 14-04);
2. in the meantime, and as a political compromise, TAC increases since 2007 have already been used to address aspirations and claims of CPCs;
3. the evolution of the quota share shows that substantial efforts have been made to accommodate aspirations of CPCs since 17 CPCs had an allocated share in 2023 compared to only seven in 1999;
4. the criteria as laid down by *Resolution by ICCAT on criteria for the allocation of fishing possibilities* (Rec. 15-13) already formed the basis for the allocation key included in Recommendation by ICCAT amending *Recommendation 11-26 on the establishment of a meeting participation fund for developing ICCAT Contracting Parties* (Rec. 14-04).

## The EU position on some key issues and criteria on allocation

### 1. Historical Catch: Track record/presence

The EU fleet has a long and continuous track record in bluefin tuna fishing. The EU has been present in all eastern bluefin tuna fisheries since as early as the 50's with a major share of the total bluefin tuna catches. Fifteen EU Member States (Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden) have participated or have been participating in these fisheries since the beginning of the data series. Amongst these EU Member States, ten (shown in bold above) have maintained a constant presence in the fishery over the 70 years where a fishing record exists (see Table 1 to **Appendix**).

Only four other ICCAT CPCs have participated as consistently as the EU in this fishery (Morocco, Libya, Türkiye, and Tunisia - see Table 2 to **Appendix**).

Nonetheless, over the past years, the number of CPCs with access to the fishery has increased progressively from seven CPCs in 1999 and 2000 (*Recommendation by ICCAT on the limitation of catches of bluefin tuna in the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean (Rec. 98-05)*), to ten CPCs in 2002 (*Recommendation by ICCAT concerning a multi-year conservation and management plan for bluefin tuna in the East Atlantic and Mediterranean (Rec. 02-08)*), to fifteen in 2014 and currently seventeen.

The EU catches over the bluefin tuna catch time series have consistently been high and these historical catches were an element in informing the allocation discussion held from 2001, leading to the 2014 agreement.

Since 2014, the catches by major CPCs have been decreasing proportionally to the quota reallocated to the new entrants and small harvesters. Albania, Egypt, Iceland, Norway, Syria, and the United Kingdom even small harvesters long distant fishing nations, such as Korea have all seen their fishing rights increase (Table 2 to **Appendix**).

In the discussions at the intersessional Panel 2 meetings, a lot of focus went to the share of the EU and claims were repeatedly made that the size of the EU's quota allocation in and of itself was somehow evidence of a substantial imbalance. It is opportune to remind Panel 2 CPCs that the EU represents 20 coastal States in ICCAT, 15 of whom have had activities in the bluefin tuna fisheries at one point (an argument used successfully by many CPCs to regain access to the bluefin tuna fishery) and 10 of whom have been active in this fishery consistently over the past 70 years. Furthermore, the EU represents 60% of the coastline of the eastern bluefin tuna stock distribution and 54% of the area of the stock distribution (EEZ area). It is hard to see how the current EU allocation would in any way be disproportionate. On the contrary, these facts would underpin a strong case for the EU to claim a higher quota share.

*EU Position:* the claim that the access to bluefin tuna fisheries has been kept closed is unfounded, with a demonstrable shift of catch possibility toward medium small harvesters.

## 2. Capacity to fish and nature of the fisheries

Since the earliest historical catch records maintained by ICCAT, the EU Member States have consistently fished for bluefin tuna, without interruption, across various fishing fleets, including artisanal coastal fisheries in both the Atlantic and the Mediterranean (see Table 3 to **Appendix**). EU fishing operations range from industrial fleets, purse seiners, and longline vessels. Purse seiners primarily operate in the Mediterranean, while longliners fish in both regions, with larger vessels more prevalent in the Atlantic. The EU commitment with the ICCAT measures set by the recovery plan dictated a major adjustment to the fleet capacity, which despite the necessity and the strong commitment, has represented major sacrifice endured by the fishing sector.

The EU's artisanal fishing fleet operates mainly in the Mediterranean, where it has a strong presence, but also extends to the Atlantic, particularly in Macaronesia (the Canary Islands, Azores, and Madeira), as well as the Cantabrian Sea.

The EU's artisanal fleets have a strategic coastal location covering vast majority of distribution of the eastern bluefin tuna stock, with geographical presence in both the Atlantic and Mediterranean.

Against this backdrop the EU notes that – for a variety of reasons – some of the new entrants and CPCs that have seen their quotas increase in the last years, such as Iceland, Namibia, Norway, and the United Kingdom have not been able to utilize or largely utilize their quotas.

### **3. Contribution to Conservation - Contracting Party's efforts in scientific research, conservation, and enforcement**

#### ***Scientific research***

The ICCAT Atlantic-wide Bluefin Tuna Research Program (GBYP), launched in 2008, has been a critical Program for monitoring the recovery plan and advancing scientific knowledge to support sustainable bluefin tuna management. This comprehensive Program includes biological studies, including microchemistry, ageing and genetic, sample collection and shipping, aerial surveys that provide independent fisheries data, tagging with both conventional and electronic tags across the species' entire distribution, and financial support for various CPCs' tagging activities.

Through ICCAT GBYP, the EU provided funding for a management strategy evaluation (MSE), leading to the adoption of a management procedure (MP) in 2022 for both eastern and western bluefin tuna stocks, a significant milestone for ICCAT. Since 2008, the EU has financed 80% or almost €18,5 million of the €23 million of this scientific research solely and directly.

In addition, the EU has a comprehensive scientific data collection system, providing additional scientific data beyond the core data requested by ICCAT. This has contributed significantly to complementary studies discussed at the SCRS and has pushed forward the scientific process and scientific knowledge.

The EU's scientific contributions are foundational to three of the five indices used for the eastern bluefin tuna MP.

#### ***Compliance***

Compliance should be a central criterion in allocation decisions. The EU has a strong record of compliance, including investment in enforcement and surveillance. The EU has been active in detecting infringements with any ICCAT measures and the EU Member States have promptly acted upon the non-complaint practices.

Strongly supporting the technological developments and the streamline of the rules to enable improving control measures.

The EU has significant investments in monitoring, control, and enforcement.

For example, the EU has been:

- leading the Joint Deployment Program (JDP), operational since 2014, which coordinates inspection strategies. The JDP, involving the European Fisheries Control Agency, the European Commission, and EU Member States, sets control priorities based on an annual risk assessment;
- implementing port inspections, with full reporting to the ICCAT Secretariat and exchanging information with relevant CPCs;
- conducting extensive inspections and surveillance, including participation in the International Inspection Program. In 2024, this included at least 306 days of sea inspections and 47 air surveillance flights.

*EU position:* The EU's strong commitment to science, conservation, and compliance have greatly contributed to sustainable fisheries management, which should be recognized in ICCAT discussions.

### **3. Dependence on the Fishery**

Given that the majority of EU vessels involved in the BFT fishery are small scale coastal operators and given the size of the EU's coastline and/or EEZ in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, bluefin tuna fisheries have a significant importance for fishing communities in several EU Member States with a strong reliance on these resources.

The dependency of the EU artisanal fleets has been recognised by ICCAT at the 2018 discussion for reallocation of the unallocated reserve for artisanal fisheries, with fishing communities in Macaronesia and the Ligurian Sea benefiting from that artisanal quota ("Total Allowable Catches (TACs) of E-BFT for 2018, 2019 and 2020" [PA2\_22/i2018]).

The increased biomass of the bluefin tuna along the well-established fishing grounds, after several years of extreme penury of this resource, and the dependency on this resource and the efforts made by coastal communities in the EU for the bluefin tuna recovery, warrant that these communities can now see increased fishing opportunities.

*EU Position:* The EU stresses that coastal communities with artisanal fisheries, especially those in EU-Greece, EU-Italy, EU-Portugal, EU-Spain, are highly dependent on fisheries for livelihoods on bluefin tuna – as recognised by ICCAT in the distribution of the 'artisanal reserve'.

#### **4. Distribution and biological characteristics of the stock(s), including the occurrence of the stock(s) in areas under national jurisdiction and on the high seas**

The re-emergence of bluefin tuna in the Northeast Atlantic has received considerable attention. Initial research results indicate that this may be linked to population growth over the past 10-15 years, resulting in a larger realized habitat niche (SCRS/P/2024/107).

However, at this year's SCRS several papers presented contradictory trends. For instance, the Japanese longline index continues to show a decreasing trend, and the UK chart program reported decreased catch per unit effort (CPUE) over the fishing period, with smaller fish being encountered in the region. In contrast, EU-Portugal traps recorded a fivefold increase this year. Furthermore, the SCRS maintains concerns over environmental factors and the changing of fishing practices, and the impacts these might have on the relative abundance indices used in the MP leading to exceptional circumstances (ECs) and also may challenge the assessment of the stock status. Moreover, the SCRS maintains that there is still a key source of uncertainty in the scale of the total population size (SCRS, 2024).

These findings call for caution before drawing strong conclusions about the state and the distribution of the stock.

#### **5. Conclusion**

The EU has been pivotal in the pragmatic redistribution towards coastal States that took place over the past years. This is in spite of the fact that according to the most commonly used criteria to establish allocation, the EU's current share is not reflective of the EU's position in the bluefin tuna fisheries. The EU represents 20 coastal States, 15 of which have a track record in bluefin tuna fisheries and 10 of which have had continuous bluefin tuna fisheries over the 70 years during which statistics have been gathered.

The EU has been the main driver for the scientific research underpinning the management of bluefin tuna, providing more than 80% of the funding for the research on bluefin tuna since 2008.

Furthermore, after a long recover period, which was only possible thanks to the severe sacrifices made by several fleets, the continued uncertainty about stock dynamics calls for maintenance of a precautionary management, while allowing for established fleets to seize the benefits for the endured sacrifice.

**Table 1.** East Atlantic bluefin tuna catches by EU Member States (1950-2023).

Year	EU-Bulgaria	EU-Croatia	EU-Cyprus	EU-Denmark	EU-España	EU-France	EU-Germany	EU-Greece	EU-Ireland	EU- Italy	EU-Malta	EU-Netherlands	EU-Poland	EU-Portugal	EU-Sweden	EU Total	ICCAT Total	EU % over Total
50's	6,376			9,120	94,753	28,698	6,127	6,600		22,990	1,101			17,298	1,021	194,086	342,300	57%
60's	1,184			449	49,709	17,121	938	7,600		22,826	978			6,244	70	107,119	197,700	54%
70's	6			15	32,332	25,131	25			51,431	367		206	755	21	110,288	153,484	72%
80's			100	42	45,526	43,773	2	644		59,874	450	-		680	2	151,092	201,641	75%
90's		10,523	136	38	68,583	81,998		5,777	87	59,814	3,363			4,263	1	234,583	412,856	57%
2000		930	61		6,265	7,335		622	22	3,847	378			502		19,962	50,000	40%
2001		903	85		5,867	6,796		361	8	4,383	224			468		19,094	50,000	38%
2002		977	91		6,304	6,587		438	15	4,628	244			186		19,471	50,000	39%
2003		1,139	79		4,685	6,507		422	3	4,981	258			63		18,137	50,000	36%
2004		828	105		5,154	7,032		389	1	4,697	264			27		18,497	50,000	37%
2005		1,017	149		5,860	9,456		318	1	4,853	350			82		22,087	50,000	44%
2006		1,022	110		5,028	8,881		255	2	4,708	270			115		20,390	50,000	41%
2007		825	1		6,094	10,829		285	1	4,638	334			29		23,036	61,000	38%
2008		834	132		6,001	2,923		350	1	2,247	296			36		12,820	24,460	52%
2009		619	2		4,178	3,454		373	1	2,749	316			53		11,744	19,818	59%
2010		389	3		2,606	1,983		224	2	1,061	136			58		6,461	11,338	57%
2012		374	18		2,393	938		176	10	1,788	137			223		6,057	10,934	55%
2013		389	17		2,502	2,414		178	13	1,938	155			235		7,841	13,243	59%
2014		387	18		2,446	2,428		161	19	1,946	160			243		7,809	13,261	59%
2017		635	110	1	4,197	4,010		235	16	3,196	261	0		429		13,091	23,665	55%
2018		744	133		5,195	4,821		267	17	3,860	308	0		450		15,795	27,782	57%
2019		831	151	0	5,389	5,381		313	6	4,286	338			475		17,171	31,134	55%
2020		908	153	1	6,063	5,873		354	16	4,731	387			592		19,077	35,038	54%
2021		907	169	3	6,182	5,848		327	16	4,699	382			614		19,147	35,095	55%
2022		818	169	6	6,061	5,842		424	20	4,727	387	0		583		19,036	35,107	54%
2023		991	194	8	6,784	6,599		367	19	5,136	428	1		634		21,161	39,247	54%

**Table 2.** East-Atlantic bluefin tuna historical catches 2000-2023 (2024 Report of the SCRS).

CPC	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
ALBANIA										50		0		9	34	40	47	56	100	156	168	148	178	264
ALGÉRIE	2,083	2,098	2,056	1,504	1,440	1,500	1,673	1,489	1,311	-			69	244	244	370	448	1,038	1,300	1,437	1,649	1,650	1,655	1,995
BRAZIL																								4
CHINA PR.	80	68	39	19	41	24	42	72	119	42	38	36	36	38	37	45	54	64	79	89	101	101	72	116
Chinese Taipei	313	633	666	445	51	277	9			-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
CURAÇAO														-	-									
EGYPT													64	77	77	155	99	124	181	263	122	327	67	
EUROPEAN UNION	19,962	19,094	19,471	18,137	18,497	22,087	20,390	23,036	12,820	11,744	6,461	6,031	6,057	7,841	7,809	9,128	10,943	13,091	15,795	17,171	19,077	19,147	19,036	21,161
GUINEA ECUATORIAL																1			7					
ICELAND			1	-	-	-	-	-	50			2	5	4	30	37	6	0			1	1	0	1
JAPAN	3,031	2,577	2,926	3,011	2,653	2,976	2,452	2,078	2,431	1,922	1,155	1,089	1,093	1,129	1,134	1,386	1,578	1,911	2,270	2,524	2,782	2,780	2,871	3,088
KOREA REP.	6	1		0	703	1,145	27	276	335	102			77	80	81		161	181	208	232	247	242	252	274
LIBYA	1,549	1,941	638	752	1,300	1,091	1,327	1,358	1,318	1,082	645	-	763	933	933	1,153	1,368	1,631	1,792	2,052	2,228	2,232	2,223	2,530
MAROC	2,923	3,008	2,986	2,557	2,780	2,497	2,386	3,059	2,478	2,278	1,553	1,237	1,213	1,270	1,269	1,498	1,783	2,141	2,571	2,920	3,454	3,294	3,565	3,664
Non-contracting parties	16,707	15,869	16,390	19,484	19,086	14,164	18,344	28,235	3	2	2	2	6	5	2	15	16	19	17	20	36	26	29	31
NORWAY	-								0					0	0	8	44	51	12	49	194	152	123	117
PANAMA								-																
SENEGAL														6	-									
SIERRA LEONE	93	118																						
SYRIA								50	41		34		-	-	-	40	47	57	66	72	79		79	
TUNISIE	2,184	2,493	2,528	791	2,376	3,249	2,545	431	2,679	1,932	1,042	852	1,017	1,057	1,057	1,248	1,491	1,788	2,102	2,380	2,653	2,730	2,659	2,698
TÜRKIYE	1,070	2,100	2,300	3,300	1,075	990	806	918	879	665	409	528	536	551	555	1,091	1,324	1,515	1,284	1,771	2,258	2,266	2,295	3,282
UNITED KINGDOM	0		0	0			0		0	1							3					2	5	22
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>50,000</b>	<b>50,000</b>	<b>50,001</b>	<b>50,000</b>	<b>50,001</b>	<b>50,000</b>	<b>50,002</b>	<b>61,001</b>	<b>24,463</b>	<b>19,820</b>	<b>11,340</b>	<b>9,776</b>	<b>10,935</b>	<b>13,244</b>	<b>13,262</b>	<b>16,215</b>	<b>19,413</b>	<b>23,667</b>	<b>27,783</b>	<b>31,136</b>	<b>35,048</b>	<b>35,097</b>	<b>35,110</b>	<b>39,247</b>

**Table 3.** EU catches by main fishing gear.

Year	Bait boat	Longline	Other surf.	Purse seine	Sport (HL+RR)	Traps	Total
2000	2,070	1,699	989	12,182	1,212	1,809	19,962
2001	2,454	1,680	573	11,728	976	1,682	19,094
2002	2,636	1,360	659	11,727	1,160	1,930	19,471
2003	1,418	1,880	541	12,446	897	956	18,137
2004	1,919	1,450	301	13,119	709	1,000	18,497
2005	2,287	1,804	434	16,056	546	959	22,087
2006	1,263	1,703	838	14,908	404	1,276	20,390
2007	2,436	1,771	502	16,758	105	1,464	23,036
2008	2,393	1,396	181	7,321	161	1,367	12,820
2009	1,298	1,297	296	7,286	169	1,399	11,744
2010	726	1,135	125	2,758	492	1,225	6,461
2011	636	961	34	2,824	330	1,247	6,031
2012	282	592	47	3,554	134	1,447	6,057
2013	236	596	156	4,871	156	1,825	7,841
2014	104	578	232	5,050	198	1,648	7,809
2015	197	785	186	5,714	325	1,921	9,128
2016	1,085	1,556	290	6,314	187	1,510	10,943
2017	1,245	1,241	292	8,042	340	1,931	13,091
2018	749	1,693	368	10,180	411	2,394	15,795
2019	918	1,724	362	11,278	418	2,470	17,171
2020	1,040	2,077	408	11,725	631	3,196	19,077
2021	1,111	1,741	416	12,646	609	2,623	19,147
2022	1,113	1,840	406	12,016	547	3,114	19,036
2023	1,153	2,231	490	13,321	630	3,337	21,161

**Table 4.** Bluefin tuna TAC allocation and quota uptake levels for various CPCs (2014-2024).

Column1	Column2	CPC	2014 REC 14-04	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Absolute difference (2023-2014)	2023 share compared to 2014 allocation	2023 quota uptake level
Small_Harvester	Coastal Satte	Albania	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.35	0.48	0.47	0.47	0.47	0.65	0.65	0.40	160%	100%
Small_Harvester	Coastal Satte	Algeria	1.07	1.07	1.05	1.07	4.47	4.49	4.60	4.60	4.60	4.99	4.99	3.91	365%	99%
Small_Harvester	Coastal Satte	Egypt	0.50	0.50	0.49	0.50	0.64	0.83	0.92	0.92	0.92	1.26	1.26	0.76	153%	100%
Small_Harvester	Coastal Satte	Iceland	0.23	0.23	0.23	0.23	0.30	0.46	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.55	0.55	0.32	139%	0%
Small_Harvester	Coastal Satte	Norway	0.23	0.23	0.23	0.23	0.37	0.74	0.83	0.83	0.83	0.91	0.91	0.68	292%	28%
Small_Harvester	Coastal Satte	Syria	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.23	0.23	0.22	0.22	0.22	0.32	0.32	0.07	27%	99%
Small_Harvester	Coastal Satte	Turkey	4.15	4.15	4.07	4.15	5.01	5.83	6.40	6.40	6.40	6.41	6.41	2.25	54%	101%
Small_Harvester	Coastal Satte	UK	-	-	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.13	0.13	0.16	0.16	0.16	0%	31%
Small_Harvester	Coastal Satte	Namibia	-	-	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.12	0.12	0.12	100%	0%
Small_Harvester	DNHS	China	0.29	0.29	0.28	0.29	0.28	0.28	0.28	0.28	0.28	0.28	0.28	-0.01	-3%	99%
Small_Harvester	DNHS	Chinese Taipei	0.31	0.31	0.30	0.31	0.28	0.26	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	-0.06	-19%	100%
Small_Harvester	DNHS	Korea	0.60	0.60	0.59	0.60	0.57	0.57	0.56	0.56	0.56	0.54	0.54	-0.06	-9%	98%
Medium_Harvester	Coastal Satte	Libya	7.00	7.00	6.86	7.00	6.55	6.39	6.26	6.26	6.26	6.28	6.28	-0.72	-10%	100%
Medium_Harvester	Coastal Satte	Morocco	9.48	9.48	9.29	9.48	9.14	9.14	9.12	9.12	9.12	9.12	9.12	-0.36	-4%	99%
Medium_Harvester	Coastal Satte	Tunisia	7.89	7.89	7.73	7.89	7.50	7.44	7.38	7.38	7.38	7.39	7.39	-0.49	-6%	99%
Medium_Harvester	DNHS	Japan	8.50	8.50	8.33	8.50	8.08	7.89	7.83	7.83	7.83	7.68	7.68	-0.83	-10%	98%
Big Harvester	Coastal Satte	EU	59.24	59.24	58.06	59.24	56.21	54.66	54.06	54.06	54.06	53.00	53.00	-6.24	-11%	94%
<b>Unallocated Reserve</b>			0.00	0.00	2.00	0.00	0.02	0.31	0.32	0.19	0.19	0.09	0.09			