

## International cooperation

### Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Coordinating Working Group on Fishery Statistics (CWP-FS)

Due to the clash of schedule with other overlapping ICCAT meetings, the ICCAT Secretariat has only partially attended the 30th Intersessional Meeting of the FAO-CWP Fisheries Subject Group (FS) (online, 28-30 June 2023). Nevertheless, the ICCAT Secretariat highlighted the close collaboration maintained in 2022 and 2023 with all other relevant CWP partners and their statistical experts (including the five tuna Regional Management Fisheries Organization (tRFMOs)) by sharing the most relevant activities carried in the last biennium and by contributing to the resolution of various data issues (data corrections, revision of existing coding systems, application of CWP fisheries harmonization standards and concepts, data exchange, etc.). The five tRFMOs have also informed the CWP on the progress of their online data management systems, with ICCAT presenting the current state of the art of the IOMS, by focusing mostly on the status of development, its technical specifications, and main mid/long term goals. All five tRFMOs confirmed that they have developed (or are planning to develop) online data reporting and dissemination systems. During the meeting it was noted how sharing experiences and knowledge on this topic among tRFMOs can further contribute to harmonize the differences among the various systems in the long run. Other relevant aspects discussed during the meeting were related to the progress of the CWP handbook, future updates of the International Standard Statistical Classification of Fishing Gear (ISSCFG) to cater for emerging needs expressed by some tRFMOs (including ICCAT), the status update of the [FAO CWP website](#) and the review of the progress made by the five CWP ad hoc task groups. The relevant documents of the meeting are freely available on the CWP website.

### Fisheries and Resources Monitoring System (FIRMS)

ICCAT is a partner of the FAO [FIRMS](#), an initiative that provides access to information on the global monitoring and management of fishery marine resources. As such the Secretariat provides updates to FIRMS regarding the stock status of all ICCAT species as assessed by the SCRS with the synchronization in the new factsheets format agreed by FAO FIRMS.

ICCAT also plays an active role in the context of the [FIRMS Global Tuna Atlas](#) which collates and harmonizes nominal catch and georeferenced catches from the five tRFMOs, and that has been recently (May 2024) updated with the latest Task 1 and Task 2 data as available on the [ICCAT website](#). It was further noted that ICCAT updated its Data Confidentiality Policy to ensure that future data submission to the Global Tuna Atlas (GTA) will follow those policy requirements.

### Aquatic Sciences and Fisheries Abstracts (ASFA)

Since the last SCRS meeting, the Secretariat has prepared 34 new entries, regarding Volumes 74(6) to 78(2) of the *ICCAT Collective Volume of Scientific Papers* for the Aquatic Sciences and Fisheries Abstracts (ASFA-ProQuest) database, from the papers published in the most recent issues of the ICCAT Collect. Vol. Sci. Pap.

### General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM)

Under the Letter of Agreement of the GFCM, within the umbrella of the Agreement between the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and ICCAT approved in the 23rd Special Meeting of the Commission (November 2022), the collaboration with the GFCM continued to develop and strengthen in areas of mutual interest to the respective organizations.

GFCM staff attended several ICCAT Meetings/Workshops (Workshop on the evaluation of ICCAT fisheries impact on marine turtle on the Mediterranean Sea, [2024 Intersessional Meeting of the Subcommittee on Ecosystem and Bycatch](#)).

In addition, the two Secretariat have been discussing ways to further enhance cooperation between the two organizations, namely regarding other bycatch matters.

At the 28th Regular Meeting of the Commission, the GFCM proposed a joint meeting on the driftnets. During the intersessional period, exchanges took place between the two Secretariats. The Secretariat noted that, due to the ban on the driftnets in the Mediterranean, it had very few data on driftnets catches, and that it was therefore difficult to make progress in the discussions. In addition, the SCRS reiterated that the availability of data is a prerequisite for studying the issue.

### **Tuna-ABNJ2 Project under FAO Common Ocean Program**

ICCAT has four proposals approved for funding through GEF funds. The first project (five years) is to improve compliance with ICCAT conservation and management measures, in particular, but not limited to Port Inspection, which will consist mainly in adding an ICCAT module onto training courses organised by CPC experts and/or other organisations. The second project (five years) is to enhance the IOMS, here the funding would help support centralised online data management (reporting, validation, storage, availability, etc.) systems that are fundamental to the successful implementation of modern-day conservation and management measures. The third project (three years) aims to generate ecosystem-based operating models for the testing of ecosystem indicators and management policies so that the validity of given indicators for stock status or ecosystem state can be tested to determine when such indicators accurately reflect the underlying stock or system dynamics. The fourth project (three years) will provide technical support for harmonization of technical work between RFMOs. This project will allow RMFOs to coordinate to identify and address common challenges in a harmonized manner, and for conveying key messages to civil society regarding progress in fisheries management, particularly in the context of ongoing Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) discussions and the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement (UNFSA) review process. These projects will be part of GEF's Common Oceans - Sustainable utilization and conservation of biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction project.

In 2024 all projects made progress. A combined Statistics and Compliance mission was carried out from 1 to 5 July in São Tomé, at the Fisheries directorate facilities. It was the first of its kind to be under ABNJ Phase II. The Secretariat's staff explained how to efficiently complete ICCAT compliance and statistical forms, the format of the data to be entered, and the synergies between the different reporting obligations. IOMS developments continued apace with, among other things, the group overseeing the development of IOMS within ICCAT (WG-ORT) having its annual meeting, the source code under the GPLv3 license being made available on GitLab. The ecosystems indicators project explored the use of machine learning to determine which data may contain information about assessed and non-assessed species (see [Carruthers et al., 2024](#)). Finally, for that project that will provide technical support for harmonization of technical work between RFMOs, a steering group of the tRMFOs agreed to hold three technical workshops: one on bycatch, likely in January 2025, one on MSE in 2026, and one on stock assessment methods in 2027. CPCs will be advised of the particulars of these workshops by circulars.

### **Tuna Compliance Network (TCN)**

The Head of the Compliance Department and one of the Compliance officers attended the meeting of the TCN in 2024, that was hosted by IOTC and also attended by compliance officers IATTC and WCPFC. The main topics discussed included the challenges related to IUU vessels cross-listing and potential solutions, the work carried out by the Network to develop a consolidated list of vessels authorized by the RFMOs, which renders further support to the existing Consolidated List of Authorized Vessels (CLAV) unnecessary and potential use of the PEW questionnaire.

It is vital that the Secretariat fully engage in the work of the TCN and therefore, it is expected that the Head of the Compliance Department will attend the TCN meeting in 2025, which will be held in Tokyo (Japan) from 8 to 15 June 2025. The Commission is also invited to consider providing funding to support future initiatives aimed at reducing the burden of IUU cross-listing and the Consolidated RFMO (Regional) Vessel Authorization Application. The responsible for compliance of IATTC was elected the new TCN Chair.

### **Cooperation agreement with Western and Central Atlantic Fisheries Commission (WECAFC)**

Following on from their discussions since 2019, the Commission approved, at its annual session in November 2023 in Cairo (Egypt), the [Exchange of Letters](#) between the Western and Central Atlantic Fisheries Commission (WECAFC) and ICCAT with a view to strengthening cooperation between the two organizations through this formal framework.

Instead of a face-to-face signature, in March 2024 the Secretariats of the two Commissions each signed the documents they subsequently exchanged. For ICCAT, the First Vice-Chair, Mrs Zakia Driouich (Morocco), attended the signing. For WECAFC, Mr. Manuel Barange, the Assistant Director-General of the FAO and the Director of the Fisheries and Aquaculture Division, was present. The signed documents were subsequently exchanged by correspondence.

### **Sargasso Sea Commission (SSC)**

Following preparatory exchanges between the Secretariats of ICCAT and the Sargasso Sea Commission, as well as its review by the SCRS in 2023, the Commission approved, at its Annual session in November 2023 in Cairo (Egypt), a Memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the two organizations aiming to strengthening cooperation through this formal framework. In March 2024, the two organizations signed the MoU separately. The signed documents were subsequently exchanged by correspondence.

### **International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES)**

After a high level (online) meeting between the Secretariats of two organizations held in August 2023, the two Secretariats started working on the MoU in June 2024. A draft of the MoU was submit for revision at the 2024 SCRS Plenary, which includes sharing of data and expertise, namely, but not exclusively, regarding elasmobranch species, as well as Climate Change and MSE matters. The SCRS endorsed the draft MoU (Draft Memorandum of Understanding between the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas and the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) [ PLE\_107/2024]) and requested the Commission considering its approval.

### **EU Regional Coordination Group Large Pelagics (RCG LP)**

In 2024, the ICCAT Secretariat has participated in-person in the annual meeting of the European Union (EU) Regional Coordination Group on Large Pelagics (RCG LP) held in Portugal from 24 to 26 June 2024. ICCAT is a potential beneficiary of the outcomes planned by the RCG LP and their subgroups on the provision by EU Member States of fisheries and biological data, through the EU Data Collection Framework (DCF).

Bearing in mind the ongoing development of the new DCF information system, that should include more detailed metadata on the storage of DCF samples and results of any analyses, the Secretariat provided a presentation summarizing the SCRS needs as an end-user, as well as possible solutions for the current issues of the system. It was highlighted the importance of the DCF for ICCAT SCRS activities, and specifically in the case of the possible implementation of the CKMR approach to improve the management of some stocks. These will require the design and implementation of new sampling schemes that should be carried out by the ICCAT Contracting Parties, particularly the EU, since the ICCAT special research programmes cannot assume the massive genetic sampling required by this methodology.

### **Mediterranean Advisory Council (MEDAC)**

The role of the Mediterranean Advisory Council (MEDAC) includes preparation of opinions on fisheries management and socio-economic aspects in support of the fisheries sector in the Mediterranean, to be submitted to the European Member States and institutions in order to facilitate achievement of the objectives of the European Union Common Fisheries Policy (CFP).

The Secretariat participated in the online MEDAC meeting on 17 October 2024 and presented the preliminary conclusions and the SCRS management advice for the stocks of eastern Atlantic and mediterranean bluefin tuna (BFT), Mediterranean swordfish and Mediterranean albacore. It also presented the SCRS bluefin tuna Management Procedure (MP) for the management of the stock, Total Allowable Catch (TAC) recommendations, the results of the [2024 Mediterranean Albacore Stock Assessment](#), and the recommendations for the Mediterranean albacore and swordfish stocks for 2025 to the 2024 ICCAT Commission.

## **Coordination between tuna RFMOs**

On the margins of the 10th meeting of the Regional Fisheries Body Secretariats Network (RSN) and the Thirty-sixth session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI-36), the Secretaries and Directors of the tuna RFMOs met to discuss how to improve their coordination and the exchange of information and experience on topics of common interest, as a continuation of regular informal exchanges. In particular, they exchanged information on the planning of meetings within their organizations, with the aim of avoiding, as far as possible, scheduling conflicts for major meetings, noting, however, the complexity of the exercise. They recommended the possibility of meeting in person once a year after informing their Commissions and receiving their approval. It was proposed to take advantage of participation in relevant international meetings to organize a meeting of tuna RFMOs afterwards or for one of the Secretariats to host the meeting in years when there is no COFI.

They recalled the present context marked by newly adopted global instruments (the Global Biodiversity Framework, the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement) and the Fisheries Subsidies Agreement), which call for greater coordination. Exchanges of practice and experience on administrative and financial issues will also be an important focus. Better coordination to harmonize points of view in fora, wherever possible and in line with their Commissions' orientations, is also expected.

## **Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT)**

ICCAT and CCSBT have adopted similar provisions regarding transshipments involving southern bluefin tuna (SBT). The two Commissions have overlapping jurisdiction in the Atlantic Ocean, where the CCSBT Resolution and ICCAT Recommendation are nearly identical, and most vessels required to comply with the CCSBT Resolution must also comply with the ICCAT Recommendation. Therefore, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was established to minimise duplication of work and reduce associated costs for those that are required to comply with both the CCSBT Resolution and ICCAT Recommendation. The first version of the MOU was signed in 2009, and a revised version was signed in 2015 to reflect updates to the recommendation. This year, a newly revised version of the MOU, designed to enable ICCAT to share Transshipment Supply Declarations with CCSBT and to remove outdated text, will be presented to the Commission at its annual meeting for endorsement (Draft of the updated Memorandum of Understanding between the CCSBT<sup>1</sup> and ICCAT<sup>2</sup> Secretariats for Transshipment at sea by Large-Scale Tuna Longline Fishing Vessels (LSTLVs) [PLE-115/2024]).

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<sup>1</sup> Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT).

<sup>2</sup> International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT).