

Opening Statement

24th Special Meeting of ICCAT
Limassol, Cyprus/hybrid
11-18 November 2024

Japanese Delegation

On behalf of the Japanese Delegation, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the Government of Cyprus as well as the European Union for hosting this important meeting in this beautiful city, Limassol. We also thank the ICCAT Secretariat staff for the excellent preparation and arrangement of the 24th special meeting of the Commission.

In recent years, the Commission has been tackling a very difficult negotiation regarding the management measures for tropical tunas, particularly bigeye tuna. While the TAC could be increased following the last stock assessment in 2021, the introduction of management schemes to keep the total catch below the TAC remains urgent. Such schemes should include an approach for addressing the growing aspirations of developing CPCs. The possible increase of the TAC can contribute to developing such an approach. Furthermore, to further increase the TAC for accommodating the interests of developing CPCs, it is essential to reduce the catch of juvenile fish, as reduction of juvenile mortality will increase the MSY and raise the potential TAC. This can be achieved through stronger management of FADs, such as the FADs closure, the limit on the number of FADs and the maximum number of FADs set. It is also worth noting that, while the yellowfin stock was assessed as green this year, the catch has been above the TAC continuously. A mechanism to constrain the catch at the optimum level is crucial. According to SCRS, the FADs closure could help reduce the yellowfin catch.

There is one thing Japan would like to stress as to catch limits. Some CPCs consider that the catch limit of Japan should and could be reduced based on the past catch record. While it is true that Japan did not fully utilize its catch limit for several years mainly due to the impacts of COVID-19, Japan's catch has recovered after the pandemic, and our initial catch limit was fully utilized last year. In addition, when Japan did not fully utilize its catch limit, the bigeye stock status was in a bad shape. Japan believes that under-utilization of the catch limit when the stock is overfished should be appreciated, not penalized. On the other hand, now that the bigeye stock status is recovering and a certain TAC increase is possible, under-utilization does not make such contribution and CPCs with fishing capacity should be given opportunities to utilize such underutilized allocation. In this regard, Japan proposes that if a CPC does not fully utilize the catch limit in the future, such CPC shall give up part of the catch limit. The catch limits obtained through such mechanisms can also help develop fisheries in developing countries.

With regard to bluefin tuna farming, Japan has been expressing concern for several years that the growth rates observed in eBCDs are sometimes too high. Although Japan appreciates active cooperation from farming CPCs on this issue, including the exchange of farming information, we believe that, to address such concern, more work should and could be done, such as strengthening the stereo video camera monitoring of all fish being caged, ensuring unbiased video footage analysis using AI, setting a benchmark for growth rate monitoring, and reviewing the SCRS growth rate tables.

With regard to the ICCAT operations in general, it is pleasing that ICCAT has resumed its active work and discussions after the pandemic. However, the increasing workload is placing an unsustainable burden on the Commission, the SCRS, and the managers and scientists in each CPC. The SCRS was very efficient in its work this year, but even so, the meeting was very long, and some items were not fully discussed. The increase in the budget is also a serious issue. Japan very much welcomes the discussions on streamlining ICCAT requirements and reducing costs for ICCAT activities.

Last but not least, Japan strongly encourages other CPCs to expedite their respective internal acceptance procedures for the Palma de Mallorca Protocol to amend the ICCAT Convention so that this Protocol will enter into force as soon as possible. Gladly, two CPCs have deposited their instrument of ratification since the last Annual Meeting. However, the Protocol still needs the approval of nearly 30 CPCs to come into force.

Mr. Chairman, the Japanese Delegation is ready to work closely and cooperatively with other delegations to find good solutions and sincerely hopes that this special meeting will be successfully and fruitfully concluded.