

The Ecology Action Centre Statement

24th Special Meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas

The Ecology Action Centre appreciates the opportunity to provide our input for consideration during this ICCAT annual meeting and we encourage the Commission to act on the following:

Adopt a Management Procedure and update North Atlantic Swordfish measure

The SCRS and Panel 4 Parties, along with stakeholders, have worked tirelessly to advance an MSE for North Atlantic Swordfish. The remaining Candidate Management Procedures are all acceptable; however, we urge the Parties to choose one with a probability of 10% (or less) of the stock falling below the limit reference point. This year also presents an opportunity for Parties to update the North Atlantic Swordfish management measure, in order to streamline and clarify the many transfers and footnotes that have accumulated over time, which complicates the verification of fishing activities. Not only is this an opportunity to streamline allocations but is an opportunity to ensure equitable access for this stock.

Protect whale sharks and mobulids

Last year, the Commission adopted Recommendations that prohibit the retention and promote the safe release of whale sharks (23-12) and mobulid rays (23-14) caught in association with ICCAT fisheries. The full implementation of these two recommendations hinges on the consensus of the Commission on advice from the SCRS. This advice is clear: ICCAT should 'give full effect' to these well-founded protections and adopt PA4-804.

Adopt a Fins Naturally Attached measure

Twenty years ago, ICCAT became the first RFMO to ban shark finning. ICCAT has since relied on a fin-to-carcass ratio which is both cumbersome for catch monitoring and unreliable for enforcing the finning ban. Moreover, it allows for high-grading of fins and hinders species identification. This year, we look to the Commission to demonstrate leadership on shark conservation by adopting the requirement that all sharks be landed with their fins naturally attached, *without exceptions* (PA4_806).

Establish a clear shark check sheet exemption request process

The establishment of a clear procedure for the SCRS and Compliance Committee to evaluate Parties' requests for exemptions to shark measures reporting requirements as per Par. 3, Rec. 18-06 is long overdue. After six years of stalled progress, this exemption paragraph should be removed, or a simple and effective exemption process must be implemented quickly to ensure transparency and clarity on Parties' compliance requirements and to verify that Parties requesting an exemption provide appropriate data needed to evaluate the request.

Strengthen Observer Coverage and Electronic Monitoring

Reliable fisheries catch data is the backbone of effective fisheries management, and comprehensive observer coverage is critical to ensure compliance and independent verification of catch. This depends on all Parties ensuring that observer coverage requirements are both sufficient and fully implemented.

We are pleased that ICCAT's minimum 10% observer coverage requirement for tropical tuna longline vessels has finally come into force and look forward to Parties' reports on EM pilots, implementation, and domestic standards. That said, according to SCRS analysis, a minimum of 20% coverage is needed to sufficiently estimate bycatch levels, with higher levels to detect more rarely encountered species. The Commission should move to require 20% coverage on all industrial longline vessels and create a plan for an increase to 100% (through a combination of human and electronic monitoring) as is already required in purse seine fleets.