POSITION STATEMENT

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Smart Fishing Initiative

WWF POSITION STATEMENT FOR THE 85TH MEETING OF THE INTERAMERICAN TROPICAL TUNA COMMISSION (IATTC)

Veracruz, Mexico, June 10-14, 2013

The tuna resources of the Eastern Pacific Ocean support a billion dollar industry that sustains the livelihoods of tens of thousands of people and contributes to economic growth and social development in the region. It is therefore vital that the member states of the IATTC maintain and expand their commitment to the responsible management necessary for sustainable fisheries. The key issues to resolve and WWF's recommendations to the IATTC 85th Annual Meeting are:

Harvest Control Rules Developed Using Appropriate Reference Points

Currently, fisheries in the Eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO) are subject to management measures imposed in a relatively opportunistic manner under a consensus-based system that must harmonize many competing interests and values. This broad range of competing interests can often lead to decisions that maximize short-term economic interests at the expense of long-term productivity and sustainability, which can result in wide variations in catch levels and, potentially, overfishing and inconsistent market supply. Implementation of fishing policies that are guided by reference points and harvest control rules allows managers to act swiftly and efficiently under a pre-agreed standard to ensure that catches do not exceed any acceptable limits, and thereby ensures the sustainability of the resource and the consistent supply of fish to our markets. The adoption of harvest control rules is a key aspect of modern fisheries management and is also a requirement of several eco-label certification programs.

WWF urges the IATTC, on the basis of the guidelines contained within the Antigua Convention, to adopt interim reference points and harvest control rules for tunas, as proposed by the staff at the May 2013 Scientific Advisory Committee Meeting in document SAC-04-09. In 2014, these reference points and control rules should be evaluated by the staff for further management advice.

Tuna Conservation

Yellowfin and Bigeye Tuna:

At the last Scientific Advisory Committee meeting, IATTC scientists reported that for the yellowfin tuna stock, recent rates of fishing mortality are at the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) level and that spawning biomass levels are below the MSY level. They further indicated that recent levels of spawning biomass predicted by the current assessment were more pessimistic than those of the previous assessment. For the bigeye tuna stock, IATTC scientists estimated that fishing mortality rates are slightly below the level corresponding to MSY, and that recent levels of spawning biomass were slightly above the MSY level. Scientists attribute this recent recovery trend of bigeye tuna in the EPO to the IATTC tuna conservation resolutions initiated in 2004. These were the results obtained when using the base case model. Scientists also indicated that if a stock-recruitment relationship is assumed, the outlook would be more pessimistic and show both species as overfished.

In light of the scientific uncertainty, WWF urges IATTC members to apply the precautionary approach, as established in the Antigua Convention, and extend the conservation and management measures for bigeye and yellowfin tuna included in document C-12-01 for an additional year until January 2015.

WWF believes that it is in the best interest of the industry to adopt more precautionary measures to control the mortality of bigeye and yellowfin tunas. Thus, WWF recommends that the IATTC should direct the staff to develop management advice that is robust to uncertainties in the stock assessments, for presentation at the 2014 annual Commission Meeting to be implemented beginning in 2015. Such measures should include rights-based management (RBM) options to directly control the mortality of small bigeye and yellowfin tunas caught in the fish-aggregating device (FAD) purse seine sector that are designed in a way to impact the fewest number of vessels. The staff paper, SAC-04-11, presented at the May 2013 Scientific Advisory Committee Meeting, offers a good foundation to develop these options. Other measures such as limits on the number of sets on FADs and purse seine vessel days could be considered as well.

Pacific Bluefin Tuna:

According to the results of the latest stock assessment conducted by the ISC in 2012, the current biomass is near its lowest level and supports high exploitation rates that are high above the biological reference point. This is a clear indicator that the management measures taken both in the Western and Central Pacific and in the Eastern Pacific are proving to be insufficient to preserve this stock.

WWF urges the IATTC to take appropriate management actions to reduce fishing mortality and to protect small bluefin tunas. In addition, the IATTC should encourage and collaborate with the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) to adopt similar conservation measures.

Management of Fleet Capacity

The problem of overcapacity in tuna fisheries seems to be common to all tuna RFMOs and this drives excessive fishing effort. It stems from fisheries management policies that are based on open access systems or common pool management systems that do not get the incentives right. As a result, fishermen are encouraged to expand fishing capacity beyond sustainable limits, even in cases where the RFMO has placed caps on the number of registered fishing vessels or established other weak rights arrangements.

In 2002, the IATTC adopted Resolution C-02-03 on the Capacity of the Tuna Fleet operating in the Eastern Pacific Ocean which set a target level of 158,000 cubic meters of total well volume for the purse seine fishery that must be reviewed on a regular basis. In 2005, the Commission adopted a Plan for Regional Management of Fishing Capacity, which aimed to achieve a sustainable fishery. During the last meeting of the Scientific Advisory Committee, IATTC staff reported that the active purse seine capacity was 219,091 cubic meters with 211 vessels that fished in the Eastern Pacific Ocean in 2012. This well volume recorded in the Commission's Regional Vessel Register exceeds the target level greatly. Overcapacity undercuts the economic performance of the fleet and it is in the best interest of the EPO tuna industry to address this problem to secure the future of EPO tuna fisheries.

WWF recommends that the IATTC does not permit any increases in capacity unless they are offset by capacity reductions.

WWF recommends that RBM approaches be combined with vessel buybacks and other financial transition programs to help solve the overcapacity problem. Strong RBM programs, with well-defined features, offer a solution to the overcapacity problem and can help the IATTC achieve the objectives of its capacity resolution and regional plan.

WWF urges the IATTC member states to strengthen the Commission's ability to monitor and control existing capacity in the EPO using the Regional Vessel Register as a management tool. Therefore, WWF strongly recommends that an amendment be made to Resolution C-11-06 to require IMO numbers for all purse seiners and longliners greater than 20m in length operating in the Convention area. This action will allow the Commission to confirm that vessels are complying with the relevant resolutions of the IATTC.

Management of FADs

Restrictions on purse seine sets on dolphins in the EPO and a movement towards more efficient fishing methods have resulted in the increased use of FADs and led them to become a major tool of the industrial purse seine fleet. Catches from purse seine FAD sets are mainly directed to canned skipjack markets, and the majority of global canned tuna is now sourced from purse seine FAD sets. There are several issues of concern around the utilization of FADs, mainly related to increases in the catch of 'non-target' species and the size of caught tunas (especially small bigeye and yellowfin tunas). In addition, the gear design that is most often used includes hanging nets to a variable depth, and these nets often lead to the entanglement of species such as sea turtles and, in particular, sharks. Another area of great concern is the ghost fishing conducted by lost FADs. WWF has committed to working with fishing industry partners such as the International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF) to increase the understanding of the impacts of FAD fishery bycatch and ways to reduce these impacts as well as to working with the fishing industry to develop and implement mitigation measures.

WWF urges the IATTC to put in place a mandatory reporting requirement of FAD data including the characteristics and numbers of deployed FADs and also the catch produced by their use. Technical information would serve as a basis for scientists to provide future management advice. Additionally, WWF urges the IATTC to prohibit the use of hanging nets and other entangling materials beneath FADs because they are both unnecessary and deadly to sharks.

Species Conservation

Sharks:

WWF urges the IATTC to support the staff recommendations to put in place a conservation measure to limit the fishing mortality of silky sharks. According to IATTC staff, there would be possible cryptic mortality associated with the use of FADs, so WWF supports adopting "Ecological FADs" to decrease this mortality.

WWF calls on the IATTC to adopt a conservation measure similar to that established in the WCPFC to protect whale sharks, which includes the banning of all intentional purse seine sets on this species.

WWF recommends IATTC member states to strengthen Resolution C-05-03 on the on-board handling of caught sharks. The collection of data on shark catches and delivery of these reports by member states to IATTC scientific staff should be mandatory. Additionally, WWF urges the IATTC to totally prohibit the removal of fins at sea and to require that sharks be landed with their fins naturally attached.

Sea Birds:

The IATTC adopted a resolution recognizing that some threatened and endangered seabirds are found in the EPO and therefore requires that EPO longline fleets employ at least two mitigation measures from a list of recommended actions. It has been scientifically proven that a combination of weighted branchlines, bird scaring lines, and night setting are best practice mitigation measures for pelagic longline fisheries.

Taking this into account, WWF recommends that the IATTC adjust Resolution C-11-02 to only allow vessels to choose two of the three mitigation measures stated above. Similar measures have been recently passed by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), the

Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) and the WCPFC and these are measures that WWF strongly supports.

Sea Turtles:

In 2007, the IATTC adopted Resolution C-07-03 which required member states to implement the FAO Guidelines to reduce the bycatch, injury and mortality of sea turtles in fishing operations, and to apply a variety of measures to reduce the bycatch of sea turtles. The resolution also required member states to annually provide the IATTC with a report on their progress in implementing the FAO Guidelines and information on interactions with sea turtles in fisheries managed under the Convention. To date, member states have provided little or no information on the progress of their implementation of the FAO Guidelines and the resolution as well as little or no information on sea turtle bycatch in longline fisheries under the IATTC's purview.

WWF urges the IATTC member states to fully implement the FAO Guidelines and consider an ecosystem-based fisheries management approach and observer program to provide the required information to the IATTC and monitor the compliance of bycatch mitigation measures. In addition, WWF encourages the scientific advisory committee to holistically assess the impact of tuna fisheries on sea turtle populations in the Convention area, as has been adopted by ICCAT.

IATTC Performance Evaluation

The performance evaluation agreed to in the Kobe Process of the tuna RFMOs has been on the agenda at all meetings of the IATTC since June 2007, but the Commission has failed to agree on how to proceed with a review of its performance. To date, all other tuna RFMOs have conducted such performance evaluations.

WWF urges IATTC member states to adopt a resolution on the performance evaluation of the commission so that it is completed before the next annual meeting in 2014.

Observer Programs for Longline Vessels

In Resolution C-11-08, the IATTC adopted a measure that requires all member states to have observer coverage on at least 5% of the fishing effort made by their longline fishing vessels greater than 20m in length by January 1, 2013. In 2012, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) provided a grant to WWF to work with the Central American Fisheries and Aquaculture Organization (OSPESCA) and its member states to assist them in implementing this resolution requirement. WWF has been working in a number of Latin American countries since 2005 to introduce a variety of best fishing practices, including the use of on-board observers. WWF trained and employed a number of observers as part of this initiative in the hopes of institutionalizing observer programs in participating countries and, as a result, reducing fisheries bycatch and improving monitoring for sustainable fisheries management. In December 2011, the Ecuadorian government established the observer program as part of their fisheries management and institutionalized the observer program, integrating WWF's program, as well as their own shark and mahi mahi observer programs. The NOAA grant has also allowed WWF to carry out assessments to evaluate the ability of OSPESCA member states to implement their own observer programs for tuna longline vessels as well as to identify their longline fleets and update their vessel registers. OSPESCA member states have also participated in a workshop where WWF presented the results of assessments and provided member states with a framework for developing observer programs that satisfy the requirements of the IATTC.

WWF urges the IATTC to continue to support and engage with its member states as they move toward implementing the requirements of Resolution C-11-08.

Our Smart Fishing Vision and Goals:

Vision: The world's oceans are healthy, well-managed and full of life, providing valuable resources for the welfare of humanity.

2020 Goals: The responsible management and trade of four key fishery populations results in recovering and resilient marine eco-systems, improved livelihoods for coastal communities and strengthened food security for the

For more information

Pablo Guerrero
EPO Tuna Coordinator
pablo.guerrero@wwf.org.ec
Tel: +593-99-9204 171

WWF Smart Fishing Initiative
Moenckebergstr. 27
20095 Hamburg
Tel. +49 40 530 200 310
www.panda.org/smartfishing