



POSITION PAPER

2016

20TH SPECIAL MEETING OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE CONSERVATION OF ATLANTIC TUNAS (ICCAT)

VILAMOURA, PORTUGAL, 14-21 NOVEMBER, 2016

WWF is pleased to participate in ICCAT's 20th Special Meeting. ICCAT is the most influential forum for the conservation of Atlantic tunas and, as always, WWF welcomes the opportunity to attend this ICCAT meeting. WWF would like to commend ICCAT for steps taken towards sustainable management and associated compliance performance of Atlantic tuna and tuna-like fisheries. WWF would like to express its expectation that CPCs will act according to the spirit of the Convention.

MEDITERRANEAN SWORDFISH

In July 2016, ICCAT's Standing Committee for Research and Statistics (SCRS) carried out the stock assessment for the Mediterranean swordfish. The assessment confirmed that the stock is overfished and has suffered overfishing for the last three decades. Very few measures have been put in place in recent years, but there is currently no plan for the sustainable management of this stock.

Too many immature fish are caught – currently about 70% of total catches – with the greatest mortality of fish aged 3 years or less. This has resulted in declining recruitment over the last 15 years.

Swordfish stock spawning biomass (SSB) is about 90% lower than the levels considered to be safe to maintain the stock. Specifically, SSB in 2015 was less than 15% of BMSY, while fishing mortality is almost twice the estimated FMSY. Based on the results of the stock assessment and ICCAT's objectives, the management recommendation from SCRS is that in order to start rebuilding the stock a substantial reduction in fishing mortality is necessary.

WWF believes that a recovery plan for Mediterranean swordfish should be put in place immediately.

A new management plan for the rebuilding of the stock to MSY levels by 2020 should:

- Guarantee recovery of the stock to levels that can deliver MSY by 2020
- Be based on scientific advice and adopt an ecosystem-based management approach
- Establish a Total Allowable Catch limit that reduces fishing mortality
- Limit the use of certain fishing gears and include provisions for gear modifications to allow the protection of juveniles and reduce unwanted catches
- Review the Minimum Conservation Reference Science, according to the best scientific advice
- Include measures to enhance monitoring, control and surveillance in order to prevent illegal catches.

EAST ATLANTIC AND MEDITERRANEAN BLUEFIN TUNA

Important steps have been taken for the management of the East Atlantic and Mediterranean bluefin tuna stock. Now it is time to capitalize on efforts and make sure that full recovery is achieved by 2022.

Scientific research is moving forward showing the complexity of bluefin tuna biology and ethology. In recent years, the SCRS reported an improved understanding of regional mixing levels, estimation of the size of fish in farms and length-weight relationships. The ICCAT Atlantic-wide research programme for bluefin tuna (GBYP) appears to have expedited this work and WWF appreciates these research efforts. The GBYP tagging programme is providing a significant insight into bluefin tuna mixing and migration patterns.

Although there are clear signs of recovery of the stock, a precautionary approach must be maintained. Until the results of the forthcoming SCRS assessment are available, with advice that may support other management options, the TAC for 2017 must not be modified upwards from ICCAT Recommendation 14-04 and not exceed 23,155t.

The use of stereoscopic cameras to measure bluefin tuna as they are caged is proving to be a viable and reliable practice. However, as CPCs use a variety of methods, WWF demands a standardised protocol for estimating fish size during all bluefin tuna caging operations.

WWF reiterates the concern of SCRS that the current fishing vessel capacity could easily result in volumes of catches well in excess of those specified in the rebuilding strategy; the fight against IUU-fishing remains a high priority.

WWF supports a fair allocation of fishing opportunities and strongly encourages ICCAT Contracting Parties to distribute national quotas between traditional and small-scale fleet segments, taking into account environmental, social and economic criteria.

BLUE AND SHORTFIN MAKO SHARKS

Assessment models indicate that the stocks of blue and shortfin mako sharks in the North and South Atlantic are not overfished. However, uncertainties about their fisheries and the lack of any kind of management scheme are of serious concern. Despite the fact that sharks are particularly vulnerable to overfishing due to their relatively slow reproductive rate, no catch limits or management plan have been ever put in place. It is now urgent to establish long-term management plans for sharks to ensure that these iconic species stay in our seas and continue playing their role in the marine pelagic ecosystem and are able to benefit fishing communities in the future.

WWF calls on ICCAT CPCs to set precautionary catch limits for blue and shortfin mako sharks as a first step towards establishing multi-annual plans in line with SCRS advice. CPCs must agree on a road map to design robust multi-annual plans within harvest management evaluation strategies and Harvest Control Rules.

CPCs reporting on catches of blue and shortfin mako sharks, by-catch data on other shark species and scientific research should be improved to facilitate the collection of biological and ecological information on these pelagic species, and provide a strong basis for management strategies.

Following EU and other CPCs leadership to tackle shark finning in the Atlantic, WWF encourages ICCAT CPCs to agree on a fins-attached policy to improve compliance with the current ban on finning. WWF also believes that observers' coverage of longliners should be increased and fully implemented.

TROPICAL TUNAS

WWF continues to be concerned about the status of Atlantic bigeye tuna, the lack of a robust long-term approach to management of tropical tunas in general and associated impacts of the massive use of FADs in the Atlantic. In 2015 the SCRS confirmed that the stock is overexploited and overfishing was likely to have occurred in 2014. Recommendation 15-01 has not been fully implemented and it is too early to assess the effects of new measures. It remains clear that in 2016 ICCAT needs to advance towards the long-term sustainable management of tropical tuna and minimisation of associated ecological impacts.

WWF encourages ICCAT CPCs to accelerate and increase efforts by setting an ambitious calendar towards the evaluation of harvest strategies with robust Harvest Control Rules for Atlantic bigeye, yellowfin and skipjack fisheries. The main achievements that WWF considers a priority are:

- Step-up progress on FAD impact mitigation, good practices, reporting and management – including high juvenile tuna catches and capacity – in line with SCRS Ad hoc Working Group on FADs guidance until more comprehensive recommendations are available. Given the important task of this Working Group and remaining gaps and challengers, it should continue working in 2017.
- Improve data collection and reporting of all types of fleets, including small-scale and coastal fisheries. Observers' coverage should reach at least 20% for those fleets ≥ 24 meets targeting tropical tuna in line with SCRS guidance.
- Full prohibition of transshipments at sea to be in force in 2017.

HARVEST CONTROL RULES-HCRS / MANAGEMENT PROCEDURE

WWF embraces the precautionary management of tuna fisheries, which requires determining how well management measures achieve their objectives, i.e. managing associated risks and probabilities. Future tuna and tuna-like species management needs to be robust against risks and use appropriate data to increase performance against pre-set management objectives.

WWF notes and recalls ICCAT Recommendation 15-07 on the development of Harvest Control Rules and of management strategy evaluation which implies identifying management objectives, acceptable quantitative levels of probability of achieving and/or maintaining stocks at sustainable levels and setting precautionary limit reference points and timeframes for ending overfishing and/or rebuilding overfished stocks.

WWF recognizes that this is a framework for scientific recommendation rather than an agreement or framework in place that requires the management body to adopt HCRs.

WWF calls on ICCAT to define in 2016 a roadmap for all ICCAT fisheries in order to establish robust Harvest Strategies that include Harvest Control Rules. Immediate action is needed for the largest fisheries like tropical tuna and the most vulnerable fisheries, including blue and shortfin mako sharks.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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Why we are here

To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.