

INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE CONSERVATION OF ATLANTIC TUNAS (ICCAT) MEETING, NOVEMBER 18-25, 2019

Tuna Conservation

What are the issues?

Effective management measures are needed to ensure bigeye and yellowfin tuna catches are maintained at sustainable levels.

Why are we concerned?

The 2018 assessment of bigeye tuna clearly shows that the stock is overfished and subject to overfishing. The 2019 assessment of yellowfin is more optimistic than the 2016 one, but this is due to changes in data, models and assumptions, rather than due to good management. The assessment shows that the stock has been declining and will soon become overfished if recent levels of catches continue. The total allowable catches (TACs) for both stocks have been exceeded substantially in recent years. Exceeding TACs will worsen status for both stocks and hinder the rebuilding of bigeye to healthy levels.

An added complication is that the catch limit is not allocated between fishing gears or Contracting Parties and Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties (CPCs) for yellowfin, and only partially allocated between CPCs for bigeye. As noted by Panel 1 last year, this lack of complete TAC accountability makes it very difficult to take corrective measures.

Our Top Asks for ICCAT in 2019

- 1** Adopt stock-specific tuna management measures that are consistent with SCRS advice; adopt complementary measures for reducing the mortality of bigeye and yellowfin tuna in the purse seine fishery; fully allocate the bigeye and yellowfin catch limits by gear and/or flag; and adopt provisions to ensure compliance.
- 2** Immediately address compliance with FAD data reporting, accelerate requiring fully non-entangling FADs, promote research into biodegradable FADs, and require the submission of FAD position data and FAD marking.
- 3** Ensure sufficient funding so that management strategy evaluation for tropical tunas continues.
- 4** Strengthen MCS measures, such as vessel monitoring systems, at-sea transshipment regulations and Port State Measures.
- 5** Require 100% observer coverage for large-scale purse seine and longline vessels, and all vessels engaged in at-sea transshipment, within five years, and adopt new binding measures that will ensure the safety of human observers, including those on carrier vessels.

The SCRS has also indicated in the past that the 2-month FAD closure in the Gulf of Guinea has been largely ineffective. Fishing effort is redistributed to other areas, and the number of active vessels has been increasing (SCRS estimates that the number of large-scale purse seiners operating in this area has increased by 18% over the past 5 years).

SCRS also noted that the 2018 catches of skipjack in the eastern Atlantic were 28% above the recommended 2012-2013 level. Reducing purse seine fishing pressure on bigeye and yellowfin will likely benefit skipjack as well.

What is ISSF asking ICCAT to do?

- (1) Adopt stock-specific management measures for yellowfin and bigeye consistent with SCRS advice and with the elements identified by Panel 1 in 2018. This includes appropriate and fully allocated TAC levels, capacity limits that are commensurate with the TAC allocations, provisions to ensure catches are in compliance with the TACs, and developing and adopting procedures to identify and sanction through the ICCAT Compliance Committee non-compliance with the current TAC allocations.
- (2) Adopt complementary measures for reducing the mortality of bigeye and yellowfin tuna in the purse seine fishery, such as strengthened FAD management, limitations on the use of supply and support vessels, expanded time/area closures, and effort controls such as a seasonal closure.
- (3) Strengthen its management of tropical tuna fisheries by adopting in-season monitoring of catches (including discards) to avoid overshooting of catch limits.

Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs)

What are the issues?

In the Atlantic, FAD sets account for nearly 50% of tropical tuna catches — including 67% of skipjack catches. Comprehensive data on FAD deployments and usage are required to effectively manage the tropical tuna purse seine fishery. Ensuring that deployed FADs are non-entangling and moving towards biodegradable FADs is critical to mitigating ecosystem impacts.

Why are we concerned?

Only a few CPCs submit the required data, usually incompletely, thus hindering regional analyses by SCRS. In 2019, only 4 out of 9 CPCs that have large-scale purse seiners reported required FAD data. ICCAT FAD limits, the highest among all tuna RFMOs, may be affecting the sustainability and recovery of bigeye which is currently overfished and undergoing overfishing. ICCAT requires non-entangling FADs, but this measure and its compliance needs to be reinforced. Using biodegradable FADs is critical to reducing marine debris.

What is ISSF asking ICCAT to do?

- (1) Review CPC compliance with FAD limits and reporting obligations in Rec 16-01 and take corrective measures, including by developing and adopting procedures to identify and sanction through the ICCAT Compliance Committee non-compliance with FAD data reporting requirements.
- (2) Reduce the 500 per-vessel limit on the number of active FADs, currently the highest of all tuna RFMOs. Other RFMOs have limits as low as 300 active FADs per vessel plus a maximum number of buoys that can be purchased annually.
- (3) Amend Rec 16-01 to transition towards the use of fully non-entangling FADs (i.e., without any netting in the submerged structure), and require fleets to remove entangling FADs found in the water.
- (4) Mitigate negative impacts on coastal habitats and marine ecosystems and FADs' contribution to marine litter by using biodegradable materials in FADs and designing mechanisms and incentives for recovering FADs.
- (5) Require the submission of FAD position data and acoustic records from echosounder buoys to national fisheries

departments on a real time basis and national research institutes on a time delay basis of 3 months, where requested.

(6) Adopt a FAD marking scheme based on the FAO Guidelines on the Marking of Fishing Gear to apply to all FAD deployments, regardless of vessel type.

Harvest Strategies

What are the issues?

Harvest Strategies — which include target and limit reference points together with harvest control rules — provide pre-agreed rules for managing fisheries resources and acting on stock status changes. These pre-agreed rules must be robust to help rebuild stocks or avoid overfishing.

Why are we concerned?

ICCAT has been developing harvest strategies and testing them through MSE, seeking to adopt them for priority stocks within a planned timeframe. The Commission needs to ensure that any additional resources required are available to ensure the timely adoption of these strategies.

What is ISSF asking ICCAT to do?

ICCAT should support the continuation of MSE for tropical tunas by funding it, as recommended by SCRS.

Bycatch and Sharks

What are the issues?

ICCAT needs to improve measures and strengthen bycatch-mitigation efforts and maximize these vulnerable species' post-release survival in both purse seine and longline fisheries. In addition, science-based conservation and management measures to limit fishing mortality on sharks must be adopted and implemented. Data collection and reporting is essential.

Why are we concerned?

ICCAT is the only tuna RFMO with no best-practice handling and release guidelines in its sea turtle or shark recommendations. ICCAT has also not adopted measures for mobulid ray conservation or to prohibit the intentional setting by purse seine vessels on whale sharks.

What is ISSF asking ICCAT to do?

- (1) Adopt measures to mitigate the incidental catch and maximize the release survival of sharks, mobulid rays, and sea turtles, including handling-and-release best practices as have been adopted in other tuna RFMOs. For silky sharks, the main bycatch issue in FAD sets, adopt a combination of practices and incentives to reduce mortality and increase survival — such as using best practices for the live and safe release from the deck.
- (2) Strengthen ICCAT's shark-finning measure [Rec 04-10] by requiring that all sharks be landed with fins naturally attached.
- (3) Adopt a Recommendation to prohibit deliberate purse seine setting around whale sharks, as has been done in WCPFC, IATTC and IOTC.
- (4) Follow the SCRS advice to manage shortfin mako shark stocks.

Monitoring, Control and Surveillance

OBSERVER COVERAGE AND ELECTRONIC MONITORING

What are the issues?

Comprehensive observer coverage on vessels is critical to sustainable fisheries management for tropical tunas.

Why are we concerned?

ICCAT only requires 100% observer coverage on tropical tuna purse seiners during the time/area 2-month FAD moratorium and 5% for longline fisheries, which is not being complied with. The SCRS has highlighted that the current 5% observer coverage requirement is inadequate to provide reasonable estimates of total bycatch. The paucity of data on longline catches and interactions with non-target species prevents assessments — hindering scientific input on effective conservation measures. Further, to ensure quality data from observer programs, observers must be able to do their jobs in a safe and professional environment.

What is ISSF asking ICCAT to do?

- (1) Identify and sanction through the ICCAT Compliance Committee non-compliance with the current 5% longline coverage requirement. Within five years, require 100% observer coverage (human and/or electronic) for both longline and purse seine vessels.
- (2) Adopt a new binding measure to ensure human observer safety, including on carrier vessels, as has been done by IATTC and WCPFC.
- (3) Advance best practice e-monitoring and e-reporting standards, including for logbooks, with emphasis on longline vessels.

TRANSSHIPMENT

What are the issues?

If not transparently managed, transshipment at sea can enable Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing. To ensure complete data collection and timely reporting and to combat IUU fishing, ICCAT must address its transshipment measure's deficiencies and loopholes.

Why are we concerned?

The ICCAT transshipment recommendation does not follow best practices on time frames for seeking authorization to transship at sea from the flag State, observer coverage, and deadlines for submitting completed transshipment declarations.

What is ISSF asking ICCAT to do?

- (1) Amend the ICCAT Transshipment Recommendation 2016-15 to:
 - (i) Increase the advance notification of transshipment requirement to at least 48 hours.
 - (ii) Require fishing vessels to submit transshipment declarations to the ICCAT Secretariat and Flag State in near real-time, but no more than 24 hours after the transshipment event.
 - (iii) Require 100 percent observer coverage (human, electronic, or a combination) on both the fishing vessel and carrier vessel for all at-sea transshipping events.
 - (iv) Require all carrier vessels to be flagged to an ICCAT Member or, at a minimum, a Cooperating Non-Party;
 - (v) Establish a public list of all vessels authorized for at-sea transshipment activities.

- (vi) Require reporting all at-sea transshipment events (such as notifications, declarations and observer reports) to the Secretariat, flag States of both the fishing and carrier vessels, and the relevant port and coastal States.
- (2) Develop electronic reporting standards for receiving vessels.

MCS TOOLS

What are the issues?

MCS tools are essential for sustainable fisheries management. For example, satellite Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS) strengthen vessel compliance on the water, combat IUU fishing, and improve fisheries management by reducing uncertainty. Port state measures combat IUU fishing and ensure IUU fishing products do not enter the market.

Why are we concerned?

ICCAT's MCS tools, such as its VMS and Scheme for Minimum Standards for Inspections in Port, must be further strengthened in line with best-practice standards and the FAO Agreement on Port State Measures, respectively.

What is ISSF asking ICCAT to do?

- (1) Modernize its VMS measure [Rec. 18-10] in line with global best practices, such as providing VMS data to the Secretariat, SCRS scientists and the Compliance Committee, and developing a centralized or partly-centralized program.
- (2) Require all vessels authorized to conduct at-sea transshipment to have an operational VMS system onboard and provide VMS position data to the ICCAT Secretariat in near-real time with appropriate confidentiality protections.
- (3) Amend Recommendation 18-09 to align it with the 2009 FAO Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing. ISSF urges all CPCs to ratify the 2009 FAO Agreement.

Compliance

What are the issues?

ICCAT has one of the best designed and most transparent compliance assessment processes of the five tuna RFMOs, but it can be strengthened. A strong compliance process improves fisheries management.

Why are we concerned?

ICCAT has enhanced its compliance assessment process, but procedural and policy improvements are still needed.

What is ISSF asking ICCAT to do?

- (1) Codify Resolution 16-17 into a binding Recommendation, as soon as possible.
- (2) Require members to submit a compliance action plan for identified infractions.
- (3) Develop audit points or performance metrics for ICCAT measures to clarify members' obligations and reporting requirements for the Compliance Committee, such as been developed for sharks in Rec. 18-06.
- (4) Develop information-exchange mandates and systems between the ICCAT Compliance Committee and the Commission regarding measures with unclear obligations and/or reporting requirements.

Did You Know?

ISSF is collaborating on biodegradable FAD research with fleets, coastal nations, and other stakeholders.

ISSF resources for vessels include skippers guidebooks on bycatch-mitigation techniques as well as reports on electronic monitoring and vessel monitoring systems.

ISSF offers guidelines for implementing non-entangling FADs.

Three ISSF conservation measures focus on shark bycatch.

ISSF Global Priorities for Tuna RFMOs

Implementation of rigorous harvest strategies, including harvest control rules and reference points.

Effective management of fleet capacity, including developing mechanisms that support developing coastal state engagement in the fishery.

Science-based FAD management & non-entangling FAD designs.

Increased member compliance with all adopted measures, and greater transparency of processes reviewing member compliance with measures.

Strengthened Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS) measures and increased observer coverage, including through modern technologies such as electronic monitoring and e-reporting.

Adoption of best-practice bycatch mitigation and shark conservation and management measures.



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