



WWF

POSITION
PAPER

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26TH REGULAR MEETING OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE CONSERVATION OF ATLANTIC TUNA (ICCAT)

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On the occasion of the 26th Regular meeting of the Commission, WWF encourages ICCAT Contracting Parties and Cooperating non-contracting Parties (CPCs) to continue their efforts and actions to improve the state of the stocks, maintaining progress towards long-term sustainability and ecosystem-based management.

The adoption and follow up of the process for ratification of the amended text of the ICCAT Convention – which includes a stronger decision-making process and finally enlarges the scope to enhanced elasmobranch conservation – can no longer be postponed. The adoption of ambitious conservation and management measures can be facilitated by transparent decision-making mechanisms, limiting the risk of blocking or opting-out behaviour with a transparent procedure for making objections and mechanisms for the timely resolution of disputes to deliver on the Commission's core mission.

Transparency and anti-IUU measures

WWF recognizes the efforts and progress made so far by ICCAT to curb IUU fishing. However, further important steps need to be taken to achieve full traceability of all fisheries and stop IUU fishing. WWF urges CPCs to:

- amend ICCAT Recommendation 06-14 to promote compliance by Nationals of Contracting Parties, Cooperating non-Contracting Parties, Entities or Fishing Entities with ICCAT Conservation and Management Measures and strengthen ICCAT Recommendation 18-08 (paragraph 1) on establishing a list of vessels presumed to have carried out illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing activities, in order to prevent nationals from further deriving benefits from or supporting IUU fishing;
- amend ICCAT Recommendation 13-13 concerning the establishment of an ICCAT record of vessels of 20m or greater overall length authorized to operate in the Convention area to expand IMO numbering requirements to all eligible vessels;
- implement measures consistent with the international minimum standards outlined in the ILO Work in Fishing Convention and IMO Cape Town Agreement, to ensure safe and decent working and living conditions on board for all fishers and fisheries observers flying their flag and operating within the ICCAT Convention Area. In addition, we encourage CPCs to develop a new measure requiring regular data collection and reporting on safety and labour-related incidents that occur within the Convention Area.

Atlantic Bluefin Tuna

WWF considers the management measures adopted with ICCAT Recommendation 18-02, establishing a multi-annual management plan for bluefin tuna in the Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean Sea, to be a step in the right direction for the long-term management of the stock. Many concerns remain, however, regarding traceability and control measures which do not ensure full accountability of the catches, especially for farms and the trade of live fish. Therefore, WWF urges the Commission to make all the necessary efforts to tackle this issue, including:

- establishing a working group on bluefin tuna control and traceability measures, with clear terms of reference and the mandate to agree on additional control and traceability measures to amend ICCAT Recommendation 18-02 reinforcing the efforts made over the past years for the recovery of the stock.

Furthermore WWF acknowledges the adoption of Harvest Control Rules for North Atlantic albacore as a first successful result towards implementing a comprehensive harvest strategy to manage stocks under the Convention area. Recognizing that additional efforts are needed to develop and test Harvest Strategies through Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) for priority stocks in the Convention area, WWF urges the Commission to **fast-track the adoption of MSE-tested management procedures for Atlantic bluefin tuna as a tool to sustainably manage stocks in the long term.**

Tropical tuna

Considering the concerns around the state of tropical tuna stocks in the Atlantic Ocean, particularly bigeye tuna, WWF is apprehensive in light of the failure of the Commission meeting in 2018 to reach consensus on a proposal for a recommendation to establish a multi-annual conservation and management plan for tropical tuna.

WWF urges CPCs to make every effort to agree on and adopt a comprehensive management, monitoring, control and surveillance scheme which includes ad hoc measures for all gears and Flag States targeting tropical tunas in the Atlantic Ocean. In particular WWF recommends:

- reducing bigeye tuna TAC to 45,000t, bringing the probability of ending overfishing in 2020 to 75% and ensuring that by 2027 the stock is not overfished;
- urgently adopting management measures such as area and time closures to reduce catches of bigeye and yellowfin tuna juveniles both with purse seines and pole-and-line fisheries in accordance with the existing catching regime and real capacity at sea. In order to improve longline fisheries reporting and performance, an improvement in the current MCS scheme for large- and small-scale fisheries will also be required to prevent quota overshoot. This should also have a positive impact on skipjack tuna stocks;
- substantially reducing the maximum number of FADs per vessel to at least 300 per year regardless of the activation status, with a scheme for further reduction in the following years. With the current 500 per vessel ICCAT has the highest number of FADs allowed among tuna RFMOs;
- establishing safeguards and mechanisms to ensure that CPCs comply with TACs. A first step would be national action plans to manage tuna fisheries and enforce the allocated quota, including monthly reporting to the ICCAT Secretariat for all tuna fisheries. Among other measures, capacity limits per fleet and CPCs should be immediately adopted and the Secretariat should be provided with the tools and resources to monitor tropical tuna catches throughout the year to help prevent any TAC overshoot;
- improving MCS measures in all fisheries, including a legally binding requirement of 100% observer coverage for large purse seines and a minimum of 20% coverage for large longliners year round, with 100% coverage as a mid-term target either human, electronic or a combination of both;
- addressing major gaps in FADs data reporting by key CPCs by adopting a legally binding measure that requires that such data submission ensures compliance with the requirement of ICCAT Recommendation 16-01 to use non-entangling FADs, and supporting research regarding biodegradable FADs while promoting global best practices to reduce FAD-related juvenile mortality and bycatch, regardless of the gear used;
- that all FAD-related data included in paragraph 23 of ICCAT Recommendation 16-01 adopts 1x1 squares to facilitate analysis;
- that the FAD owner reports data in real-time to the relevant fisheries department;
- implementing science-based management and monitoring recommendations developed by ICCAT's FAD Working Group and joint RFMOs' FAD Working Group adopting FAD management objectives with a schedule of activities.

Mediterranean swordfish

After 30 years of overfishing, a 15-year recovery plan for Mediterranean swordfish was adopted in 2016 with ICCAT Recommendation 16-05. Total Allowable Catches for 2017 were set at 10,500t, with a 3% reduction for the following 5 years. While recognizing the efforts that CPCs have made to improve the status of this highly depleted stock, WWF is still concerned about the current level of catches of this species in the region. Catches in the period 2012-2018 are reported to be among the lowest of the last three decades. The yield in 2018 was 7,017t which is about 30% less than the TAC for the same year (9,879t). WWF is concerned that the current recovery plan sets catch limits that are not taking into account the real level of catches. WWF therefore asks CPCs to:

- reduce catch limits by at least an additional 10% to align the TAC to the current level of reported catches from the implementation of the recovery plan;

- improve estimates of discards of juvenile swordfish in fisheries targeting both swordfish and albacore, and submit this information to the ICCAT Secretariat;
- secure a full stock assessment for Mediterranean swordfish in 2020.

Sharks

WWF is concerned about the status of pelagic sharks in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean and welcomes an expansion of the Convention's scope for enhanced elasmobranch conservation. It is now urgent for the Commission to formally adopt the new text and follow up the ratification process to ensure comprehensive management of existing target shark fisheries in the Convention area.

WWF recognizes the efforts that CPCs have made in recent years to ban and/or limit the retention of certain vulnerable species and improve the compliance review of conservation and management measures regarding sharks caught in association with ICCAT fisheries. However, to limit fishing mortality and improve sharks' chances of survival after release, WWF urges that science-based conservation and management plans for heavily depleted species must be adopted and implemented beyond the ban on capture and retention. Additional management measures to further reduce mortality should include – but not be limited to – area and time closures, gear restrictions and safe handling and best practices for release of live specimens. The prohibition of deliberate setting of purse seine nets around whale sharks¹, as has been done in other tuna RFMOs, should be urgently adopted.

WWF recognizes the adoption of ICCAT Recommendation 17-08 on the conservation of the North Atlantic stock of **shortfin mako** caught in association with ICCAT fisheries, now listed in Appendix II of CITES and updated to globally Endangered on the IUCN Red List early this year, and underlines that – according to scientific advice – even under a 0t catch, the stock will continue to decline until 2035 before any increase in biomass can occur. Taking note, in addition, of the recent inclusion of this species in CITES Annex II, WWF therefore:

- urges CPCs to immediately stop overfishing by adopting a zero retention policy to increase the chances of rebuilding the North Atlantic stock of such a vulnerable species by 2045 with a 53% probability of success; for the South Atlantic stock, following a precautionary approach and considering the risks highlighted in the scientific advice, catches should also abide by a zero retention policy to prevent this stock from following a similar trajectory to the Northern stock;
- calls for the repeal of the exceptions in ICCAT Recommendation 17-08 that allow for the retention of some caught shortfin mako as they will not permit the recovery of the stock by 2070, while keeping the requirements for data collection and reporting of the number of dead discards and live releases as well as encouraging the collection of biological samples;
- asks for the adoption of best handling and release guidelines to increase chances of post-release survival for mako sharks and other vulnerable species;
- recommends additional management measures including reduction of soak time, area and time closures, and safe handling and best practices for the release of live specimens to further reduce incidental mortality aligned with scientific advice;
- recommends the identification of aggregation and spawning areas to urgently limit interaction with ICCAT fleets and decrease shortfin mako mortality;
- asks ICCAT to ensure that CPCs are provided with adequate information to support the preparation of “non-detriment findings” (NDFs) by the authorized national CITES Scientific Authorities of CPCs to ensure the proposed export is not detrimental to the survival of the species; should a regional NDF be agreed to by ICCAT, WWF urges taking into account the most precautionary recommendations of the SCRS. Based on the SCRS report WWF believes that at this point in time the scientific advice would clearly not support an NDF for issuing respective CITES permits for mako sharks.

¹ WWF stresses that whale shark has recently been listed as Endangered (June 2016, Vulnerable previously) by the IUCN, and is included in Appendix II of the CITES; and in Appendix II of the Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS).

Taking into account the state of both Northern and Southern Atlantic stocks of **blue shark**, WWF recommends that the Commission mandates the SCRS to develop additional advice for the definition of a sound long-term management plan for both blue shark stocks including – but not limited to – the establishment of interim Harvest Control Rules, the potential adoption of a minimum size (to ensure maximum survival of age classes 0-4 years) and maximum size to protect big females, spatial/temporal measures, and other by-catch avoidance strategies, including spatial management measures based on scientific evidence.

For both stocks of blue shark, WWF recommends a precautionary approach based on the lack of available data and therefore asks the Commission to limit catches of this species in the Atlantic. In keeping with the scientific advice, the average catch reported in the five year period considered for the assessment model could be used as an upper limit.

WWF urges CPCs to put an end to the situation of limited data and increase observer coverage – either human, electronic or a combination of both – to reach 100% in the next five years for purse seine and longline fisheries; this would strengthen monitoring and data collection efforts to monitor catches, landings, number of dead discards and live release of sharks, encourage the collection of biological information and samples and build the basis for robust assessments of the status of shark stocks.

In addition, WWF asks all CPCs to make further efforts to finally progress on the adoption of a **fins attached policy for sharks**, following the remarkable steps forward already made by NAFO (2017), GFCM (2018) and partially IOTC (2018) in this direction.

WWF also requests a revision of the Shark Implementation Check Sheet as per ICCAT Recommendation 18-06 and that it include measures for blue sharks and mako sharks and requests that the Committee of Compliance takes steps to ensure that parties are collecting and submitting data on dead discards and live releases as required.

WWF also raises the question of the commercialization of big individuals of blue shark and mako shark (blue sharks longer than 250cm total length and shortfin mako longer than 190cm TL). This is based on the frequent occurrence of Hg concentration above the maximum limit allowed by the European Union (1 mg kg⁻¹ wet weight) for marketing, and the risks that consumption of this seafood poses to people.

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.