WWF

POSITION PAPER

2015

WWF POSITION

ICCAT the 24th Regular Meeting of the Commission

St Julian's, Malta, 10-17 November, 2015

WWF is pleased to participate in the 24th ICCAT Annual Meeting. ICCAT is the most influential forum for the conservation of Atlantic tunas and, as always, WWF welcomes the opportunity to attend this meeting. WWF would like to commend ICCAT for its steps towards sustainable management and associated compliance performance of Atlantic tuna and tuna-like fisheries and express its expectation that CPCs will act according to the spirit of the Convention.

BLUEFIN TUNA

Our understanding of bluefin tuna ecology is growing. SCRS has reported on the improved understanding of regional mixing levels, size data from catches destined for farms and length-weight relationships. These sources show the complexity of bluefin tuna behaviour. The GBYP appears to have expedited this work and WWF appreciates those research efforts. The GBYP tagging programme gives significant insight into bluefin tuna mixing and migration patterns. WWF is proud to contribute to the electronic tagging programme and is committed to continuing such efforts.

The use of stereoscopic cameras in measuring bluefin tuna at the time of caging is proving to be a viable and reliable concept. These data could contribute to the accuracy of stock assessments, however, as CPCs are using different methodologies,**WWF demands a standardised protocol for estimating fish size during 100% of the bluefin tuna caging operations.**

It is essential to obtain fisheries-independent indices of abundance for bluefin tuna, since together with accurate catch reports, they should form the foundation of management advice. This is even more urgent, now CPUE series are being distorted by recent regulatory measures. WWF stresses the SCRS concern that the current vessel capacity could easily catch volumes well in excess of the rebuilding strategy, so the combat against IUU-fishing remains a high priority.

Recognising that the SCRS did not yet provide robust advice on an upper TAC bound, **WWF urges CPCs to apply moderation when setting a TAC for bluefin tuna and live up to their commitment in continued support of research efforts for this purpose**. This would imply that the TACs for 2016 should not be modified upwards from ICCAT Resolution 14-4, pending results from SCRS assessments that would support such advice.

BLUE SHARK

Despite assessment models indicating that North and South Atlantic blue shark stocks are not overfished, the lack of certainty about the status of the blue shark is of serious concern. A sound basis for calculating the total removal of blue sharks is lacking altogether and the increasing trends of the CPUE series cannot be fitted with conventional modelling. This underlines the need for fisheries-independent surveys. The SCRS recommends that CPCs improve on data quality for blue sharks with great urgency. When in doubt, precaution should be taken, so CPCs should ensure steep reductions in shark bycatch. This may be enhanced by enforcing data collection for all shark catches, whether targeted or caught as bycatch. In order to ensure the long-term sustainability of blue shark stocks, **WWF urges ICCAT to give high priority to the design and application of a long-term management plan for blue sharks and shortfin mako, including HCR, sound catch and capacity limits and risk analyses**.

BIGEYE TUNA

WWF expresses concern about the status of Atlantic bigeye tuna. SCRS confirms that the stock is overexploited and overfishing likely occurred in 2014. This is counter to the spirit of ICCAT and needs to be resolved immediately. The 2015 assessment of bigeye tuna report shows a probability of recovery around 29% for bigeye stock with the current TAC (85,000 t) level by the end of the projected period (2028) The catch level (68,390 t) for 2014 was about 80% of that, but with a catch level of 65,000 maintained until 2028, the recovery probability would still be less than 50%. In line with SCRS, **WWF cannot support such low probabilities and the BET-TAC should be reduced substantially to allow recovery with a higher probability and within a shorter timeframe**, until a higher TAC can be substantiated with data and research evidence.

Longliners (48%) and purse seiner (37%) fleets account for 85% of the total bigeye tuna catches. Fishing on FADs is highly efficient for the purse seiners fleets, but this has led to a remarkable increase in fishing effort and large catches of juvenile bigeye, which was always of secondary importance to the purse seine fleets. FAD fishing is undeniably indiscriminate in this regard. The mean weight of bigeye catches in FAD fishing is 4kg, while it is around 8kg for free schools and 62kg for longliners. The use of FADs by some of the largest purse seiners fleets has increased to 80-85% in the last few years. The fleet targets skipjack, but bigeye is caught as bycatch. SCRS has expressed concern that this increase may have added pressure to the bigeye stock. **WWF urges CPCs to regulate/control the application of FADs, limiting FADs capacity and establishing effective measures to reduce FAD-related and other fishing mortality of small bigeye tunas**.

In addition, it is urgent to adjust fishing capacity according to sustainable catch limits, ban longliners/all transhipments at sea, more consistent consideration in the TAC of those catches of national fleets with lower bigeye harvest levels and 100% observers coverage for all vessels over 24 meters targeting tropical tuna.

SWORDFISH STATUS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

Unfortunately, Mediterranean swordfish stock is still in a miserable state. Despite a variety of recent management measures, like time closures and minimum landing size, this swordfish stock is still well in the red block of the Kobe plot, implying that the stock is below the level that could support MSY and current fishing mortality exceeds F_{MSY}. According to the SCRS report, close monitoring of swordfish fishery is urgent, given the possibility of increased discard levels. The ICCAT list of the number of vessels authorized to catch swordfish is generally higher than the total of active vessels active in CPC waters. WWF calls on ICCAT to establish an ambitious recovery plan in accordance with ICCAT management objectives, in line with SCRS advice on catch limits, and investigate and avoid potential loopholes in ICCAT's active vessels list.

HARVEST CONTROL RULES-HCRS / MANAGEMENT PROCEDURE

WWF embraces the precautionary management of tuna fisheries. It requires determining how well management measures achieve their objectives, i.e. managing the associated risks and probabilities. Any future tuna management needs to be robust against risks and use appropriate data to increase performance against the pre-set management objectives. New data collection could focus on reducing the accumulated risk of not meeting the management objectives. Higher quality data should lead to a better performance of the management regime. This automatically would lead to higher quotas, as long as the science is encountering a wide array of risks.

Harvest Control Rules (HCRs) form a crucial element of fisheries management, but more is needed. A draft management mechanism first needs to have long-term objectives. Subsequently, it could be tested for its robustness to uncertainties in possible HCRs, simulation studies, stock assessment methods and population models, uncertainties in abundance indices and catch reports, inclusion of oceanographic/ecosystem considerations, etc. Eventually, all such factors contribute to estimates of accumulated risk. An illustration is the SCRS management recommendation on North Atlantic Swordfish, where SCRS seeks better guidance on probabilities for maintaining the stock in a rebuilt condition. Once this step is taken by ICCAT, stocks meeting such criteria could become eligible for MSC-certification, for which HCRs and other strict management measures are conditional. That would open up market opportunities for sustainable fisheries.

How much risk ICCAT will be prepared to take when redefining its long-term management conditions is a matter for ICCAT, it is not a scientific matter. **WWF calls on ICCAT to recognise that setting management objectives is the responsibility of ICCAT.**

WWF calls on the CPCs to start the identification of long-term management objectives, which could subsequently feed into SCRS work to test the validity of such objectives using simulation studies. An iterative exchange between the Commission and SCRS should eventually lead to a robust procedure, which increasingly improves its performance to the pre-set ICCAT objectives over time.

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