

INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE CONSERVATION OF ATLANTIC TUNAS

17th extraordinary meeting of ICCAT

27th November, 2010

PARIS, FRANCE – The International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas held its 17th Special Meeting from the 17th to the 27th of November 2010 in Paris, hosted by the French Government. The meeting focused on the management of tuna and tuna like species under the mandate of the Commission and compliance with management regulations by the 48 Contracting Parties (CPCs) [members] of ICCAT. The Commission reviewed the status of tuna stocks and by caught species, such as sharks and turtles in the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea based on the findings of the Standing Committee for Research and Statistics Scientific (SCRS) which met in Madrid in October 2010.

At the end of the meeting the CPCs members of ICCAT adopted new management measures for bigeye and bluefin tunas and North Atlantic swordfish and for the conservation of sharks and sea turtles that are taken as by catch. New improved measures for monitoring, surveillance and control were also adopted. ICCAT is also taking a leading role internationally in collecting data on by caught species and in conducting research essential to ensure the long-term sustainability of all species caught in tuna fisheries.

Strengthening Compliance with Management Regulations

An improved approach to ensure compliance by CPCs with ICCAT management regulations was taken this year. The work of the Compliance Committee involved a thorough review of compliance CPC by CPC to identify failure to comply with ICCAT management measures such as a failure to report catch data or overharvesting of ICCAT stocks. A first warning is given by sending a “Letter of Concern” and then a stronger warning in the form of a “Letter of Identification”, after which sanctions may be applied. The Commission agreed to send out twenty three “Letters of Concern” and twenty three “Letters of Identification” to CPCs and two CPCs were commended. These require CPCs to report on actions to be taken in the coming year to rectify deficiencies and to submit management plans to ensure there is no continued overharvest, or else penalties may be applied. Various types of sanctions to be applied in the future were considered, e.g. reduction and withdrawal of fishing allocations, financial penalties, or exclusion from ICCAT. An intersessional meeting of the Compliance Committee will be held early in 2011 to follow up on issues raised.

Bluefin

A significant portion of the work of the meeting dealt with Atlantic bluefin tuna which has received substantial media attention due to overfishing in recent years, especially in the Mediterranean Sea. In 2006 ICCAT implemented a rebuilding plan to halt over fishing and recover the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean stock by 2022. In the 2010 fishing season, even stronger measures were agreed to accelerate rebuilding of the stock to levels that can produce maximum catches at sustainable levels. These included

- Reductions in fishing capacity.
- A limit on the number of joint fishing operations that could be carried out.
- An observer program with 100% coverage of purse seine and farming activities.
- Reporting of catches close to real-time, allowing for a close monitoring of the quota consumption.

The enhanced monitoring, surveillance, and control measures put in place have resulted in an improvement in the data reported by CPCs in the past few years. The assessment this year by the SCRS showed that the recent regulations had clearly resulted in reductions in catch and fishing mortality rates. Despite these efforts the Commission recognised that conservation and management measures for Eastern bluefin tuna must be reinforced to avoid systemic weakness, in particular related to the farming operations for bluefin

tuna. Measures were taken to ensure more accurate data on the numbers and biomass of bluefin tuna caught and transferred to tuna farms. This included observer coverage being extended to monitor all active towing vessels and purse seiners and the development of stereoscopically video systems to quantify fish captures and transfers.

The Commission also adopted a plan to create an electronic system for the entry of the Bluefin tuna Catch Documentation program, aimed at improving the system to ensure traceability. It is expected that this system will become fully operative for the fishing season in 2012. Given all these improved monitoring, surveillance and control measures, and the results of the 2010 SCRS assessment the TAC for 2011 was set at 12.900 t for Eastern Bluefin tuna, which has a high chance ($\geq 95\%$) that the condition of the stock will improve in the coming years and of about 67% that it will be fully recovered by 2022. For the Western bluefin tuna the Commission continue with their recovery plan, including protect measures such closure for direct fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico during spawning, minimum size and catch quotas. CPCs reported that an enhance research program was also started in 2010, in response to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, that will monitor closely the potential effects on the recovery of this stock. For the Western Bluefin tuna stock, the TAC for 2011 was set at 1.800 t.

Bluefin Research to ensure long term Sustainability

There are major gaps in our knowledge of bluefin tuna biology, for example needed to protect spawning populations in the Mediterranean. Therefore ICCAT has established a multi-million Euro Atlantic-wide Research Programme for Bluefin Tuna (GBYP) in support of bluefin management. This program is funded by CPCs and supported by the fishing industry and environmental NGOs. Work this year included the start of aerial surveys of spawning bluefin areas which is being evaluated by the SCRS to see if it can provide a fishery independent assessment of stock size to monitor the recovery plan.

ICCAT takes the lead in conservation of Sharks and Sea turtles

Although ICCAT's main responsibility is the management of tunas, The Commission is increasingly taking a leading role in the conservation of species caught incidentally in the tuna fisheries; setting an example to other Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs). As well as collecting data and undertaking assessments on sharks, ICCAT is also conducting research on shark species in the Atlantic and Mediterranean in order to establish measures such as time and area closures to protect nursery areas. This year six proposals to protect endangered shark species were considered and important new conservation measures were adopted by consensus for the conservation of whitetip, shortfin mako and hammerhead sharks. These measures forbid the retention and trade of white tip and short fin mako shark species in order to increase their survival. . While for sea turtles strict measures to minimise catch rates and to maximise the chance of survival of released individual were agreed.

North Atlantic swordfish

The North Atlantic stock was successfully rebuilt in 2009 to above the target set by the Commission's management plan (i.e. the biomass that could sustain maximum catches, B_{MSY}). The rebuilding plan began in 2000 and included minimum size restrictions as well as quotas. At this annual meeting, a total allowable catch (TAC) of 13,700 t was set for 2011. In 2011 a multi-year conservation and management plan will be agreed with the objective of achieving B_{MSY} with greater than 50% probability. This will be based on Limit Reference Points, consistent with the Precautionary Approach, where future decisions shall include the triggering of a rebuilding plan should the biomass decrease to a level approaching a limit reference point.

Bigeye

This year a new assessment was conducted by the SCRS and the Commission set a total allowable catch of 85,000 t, in agreement with the scientific recommendations. However, in the past the bigeye TAC has been exceeded; and other problems exist including high fishing mortality on juveniles, and the move of fishing vessels to the Atlantic Ocean from the Indian Ocean due to piracy. In order to address these problems measures such as capacity reduction, time area closures and observer programmes were discussed at the Commission and work is on going to implement these measures next year.

Miscellanea

- The meeting was attended by over 500 delegates from 35 Contracting Parties – Algeria, Belize, Brazil, Canada, China P.R., Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Egypt, the European Union, France (on behalf of Saint-Pierre and Miquelon), Ghana, Guatemala, Equatorial Guinea, Iceland, Japan, Republic of Korea, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Mexico, Namibia, Norway, Panama, Philippines, the Russian Federation, Senegal, South Africa, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad & Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, the United Kingdom (on behalf of its Overseas Territories), United States of America, Uruguay, and Vanuatu. In addition, 5 non-Contracting Parties were present, as well as 4 inter-governmental organizations and 23 nongovernmental organizations.

- In 2009 ICCAT established a Working Group on Recreational and Sport Fisheries that harvest ICCAT species. This group is actively working on the development of improved and standardised methods to better monitoring of these fisheries.

- In 2010, ICCAT spent nearly 117,000 € in capacity-building activities. These funds, from EU, Japan and USA, have been used for facilitating participation in scientific meetings, training workshops, sampling and observer programs, and to recover historical logbook data.

The next annual meeting of ICCAT will be held in Spain in November 2011. Other inter-sessional meetings will be held throughout the year; detailed venue information can be found as it becomes available in www.iccat.int, under "Meetings".

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