

INTER-AMERICAN TROPICAL TUNA COMMISSION

103RD MEETING

**Panama City, Panama
1-5 September 2025**

PROPOSAL IATTC-103 I-1

SUBMITTED BY ECUADOR

INTERIM REFERENCE POINTS FOR SWORDFISH IN THE IATTC AREA

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

REFERENCE POINT REQUIREMENTS

- The most common reference points used for swordfish in other RFMOs are based on biomass and fishing mortality. There has been a recurring tendency to consider MSY as the target reference point and use a fraction of it as the limit reference point. Documents SAC-08-05e(iii) and SAC-14 INF-O provide relevant background information.
- The IATTC has encountered significant challenges in establishing MSY-based reference points for tropical tunas due to technical, analytical, and operational difficulties. As a result, the Commission has experienced delays in adopting reference points, which has generated significant debate regarding the identification and proposal of harvest control rules.
- In 2025, the IATTC scientific staff made the following recommendations regarding swordfish management and data collection (SAC-16-11): (i) adopt interim reference points for the stock and (ii) continue monitoring the stock together with benchmark stock assessments every three to five years.
- During its 15th meeting in 2024, the Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) suggested that the scientific staff provide support in supplying data on the South Pacific swordfish fishery, and that these data be used in an update of the benchmark stock assessment to be presented to the SAC in 2026.

PROXY REFERENCE POINTS

- Although the swordfish benchmark assessment scheduled for 2026 could provide adequate information on the size and status of the stock relative to reference levels, the MSY estimates may not be robust enough for an updated model, which will require rigorous analytical and technical development.
- If RMS estimates are not robust or generate uncertainty that makes decision-making impossible, the identification and selection of reference points based on these quantities should follow a similar course to that in tropical tunas, delaying the adoption of management strategies.
- If RMS estimates are unreliable, making decision-making difficult, the identification and selection of reference points based on these quantities should follow a similar process to that applied to tropical tunas, delaying the implementation of management strategies.
- Given the delay in adopting RMS-based reference points, the adoption of proxy reference points should be considered as a precautionary measure. Early implementation of these reference points would allow short-term conservation measures to be applied, based on the results of the reference model for swordfish.

PROPOSAL C-25-XX

INTERIM REFERENCE POINTS FOR SWORDFISH IN THE IATTC AREA

The Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC), gathered in Panama City, Panama, on the occasion of its 103rd meeting:

Taking into account that the objective of the Antigua Convention is to ensure the long-term conservation and sustainable use of the stocks in the eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO);

Recalling Article 7 of the Antigua Convention, which assigns to the Commission the function of adopting conservation measures based on the best scientific evidence available;

Aware of its responsibility to make recommendations to its Members and Cooperating non-Members (CPCs) regarding the long-term sustainable use of stocks of tuna and tuna-like species;

Recognizing that swordfish (*Xiphias gladius*) is a priority species for management by the Commission, and that fishing activities have increased significantly over the last decade;

Noting that document SAC-16-11 of the Scientific Advisory Committee recommends the implementation of specific reference points, among others, based on the precautionary approach;

Concerned about the implementation of the swordfish research plan within the scheduled timeframe, including the benchmark assessment expected to be completed in 2026;

Agrees:

To adopt Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) proxy target and limit reference points to facilitate determining the conservation status of swordfish in the EPO.

INTERIM REFERENCE POINTS

1. To provisionally adopt the following proxy reference points:
 - a. Target Reference Point: The equivalent to 35% of the spawning biomass that would occur in the absence of fishing.
 - b. Limit Reference Point: The equivalent to 20% of the spawning biomass that that would occur in the absence of fishing.
2. These reference points are not the “optimal” options for swordfish, but they are feasible until more appropriate ones are identified and adopted.
3. The proxy reference points indicated in paragraph 1 may be interpreted as a deliberation by managers, based on conservation goals and aligned with the scientific staff's proposals. In fact, document SAC-14-INF-O provides a set of options for the target reference point that are consistent with those in this proposal.
4. Adopting the proxy reference points indicated in paragraph 1 would allow for the establishment of multi-year management cycles similar to those applied to tropical tunas, which should be maintained through benchmark assessments conducted every three to five years.
5. A multi-year cycle, such as 2027–2029, should provide a technical and analytical framework enabling CPCs to identify and adopt optimal reference points consistent with improvements in benchmark assessments.