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# WWF Position Statement for the 103rd Meeting of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission

The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) thanks the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) for the opportunity to attend the 103rd ordinary session as an observer.

WWF encourages IATTC member countries to make rapid progress on measures to recover marine species in the region and maintain and expand their commitment to responsible management. These are necessary conditions for achieving sustainable fishing. This is vital, since tuna in the Eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO) supports a fishing industry that sustains the livelihoods of tens of thousands of people and contributes to economic growth and social development in the region. WWF's recommendations for the 103rd Annual Meeting of the IATTC are summarized as follows:

- i. **Tropical tunas:** Either maintain the current closure or follow the advice of the scientific staff and adopt revised management measures only for 2026, which could be: a) maximum reduction of 10 days in the closure of the purse seine fishery or, alternatively, a maximum reduction of 7 days if the "corralito" is eliminated. b). Maintain the individual vessel limit for bigeye tuna and adopt the Integrated Port Sampling Program proposed by the staff or, if not, continue the Enhanced Monitoring Program that allows for the tracking of the measure.
- ii. **Management strategies evaluation:** a) Complete the management strategy evaluation for bigeye tuna, and b) Agree and adopt the management objectives and the revised reference points for tuna species.
- iii. **Pacific bluefin tuna:** Complete the management strategy evaluation in progress and develop measures and work plans for monitoring, control, and surveillance.
- iv. **Fish aggregation devices:** adopt a FAD marking scheme and require activation of operational buoys, as defined by the joint tuna RFMO FAD 2019 meeting, occur exclusively onboard prior to deployment and develop clear rules for deactivation of FAD buoys at sea.
- v. **Observer coverage and electronic monitoring:** Phase in 100% observer coverage over the next three years that requires at least 20% observer coverage (human and electronic) by 2025 on purse-seine vessels of less than 363 tonnes carrying capacity that normally do not have observer coverage on board and for all longline vessels of more than 20 m in length.

- vi. **Shark conservation:** Strengthen the finning resolution by requiring that all sharks be landed with fins naturally attached to the body; improving catch data collection for CITES-listed species, such as hammerheads and silky sharks. WWF recommends that the IATTC prepare non-detriment findings reports (NDFs) for the areas within its jurisdiction for oceanic sharks and rays listed in Appendix II of CITES.
- vii. **Fleet capacity:** Develop and adopt a plan to reduce and eventually end overcapacity in the purse seine fleet operating in the IATTC convention area.



## 1. Conservation of tropical tunas

In 2025, the staff of the IATTC evaluated tropical tuna populations using various sources of scientific information. In addition to reviewing recent trends of the population condition indicators, the 2024 reference assessments were used to evaluate the condition of bigeye and skipjack, along with the new reference assessment and risk analysis for yellowfin tuna in the EPO.

The scientific staff considers that the three tropical tuna populations are in healthy condition, with probabilities (risks) ranging from low to moderate (only for bigeye) of exceeding the reference points.

The staff concluded that the implementation of resolution C-21-04 has had a positive effect on the condition of the bigeye tuna population. The main reason behind this improvement was the implementation of the Individual vessel thresholds program to promote an incentive for fleets to change their behavior and reduce their catches of juvenile bigeye tuna in sets on floating objects. With this background and given the current state of purse seine vessel overcapacity in the Eastern Pacific WWF requests the following from the IATTC members:

- i. Maintain the current closure or follow the advice of the scientific staff and adopt revised management measures only for 2026, which could be: i) a maximum reduction of 10 days in the closed season of the purse-seine fishery or, ii) alternatively, a maximum reduction of 7 days if the corralito is eliminated.
- ii. Maintain the limit per individual vessel of bigeye tuna and adopt the Integrated Sampling Program in Port (ISPP) proposed by the staff or, if not, continue the Reinforced Monitoring Program that allows for close monitoring of the measure.
- iii. Make arrangements to make operational data for each longline set routinely available for scientific purposes.
- iv. Commit the necessary actions to allow staff to carry out a benchmark assessment of skipjack tuna in 2028-2029, including the necessary funding to carry out a program for marking tropical tunas in the RFMOs during 2026-2027.

### 1.1. Management strategy evaluation (MSE)

A MSE process for tropical tuna is underway at IATTC, with an initial focus on bigeye tuna, as it has historically been the tropical tuna that has driven management measures. Resolution C-24-08 established the Ad Hoc Working Group to strengthen dialogue among scientists, managers, and other stakeholders on the Management Strategies Evaluation.

The staff proposed a candidate extraction strategy, based on the best available science. This proposed strategy synthesizes management objectives, population and fishery dynamics, the performance of the stock assessment model, the conclusions of IATTC's MSE workshops, and lessons learned from MSE

conducted on other stocks, particularly Pacific bluefin tuna; however, the strategy has not yet been evaluated through an MSE process.

Many fisheries already certified or in the process of assessment depend on this process, which is still moving, but somewhat slowly. WWF asks the Commission to:

- i. Complete the management strategy evaluation of the bigeye tuna.
- ii. That the Commission agree and adopt the management objectives and revised reference points for tropical tunas.



## 2. Pacific bluefin tuna conservation

Technical reports of all scientific and management bodies responsible for management of the Pacific bluefin tuna stock, including the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific Ocean (ISC) and the IATTC scientific staff, indicate that the Pacific bluefin tuna stock recovered and spawning stock biomass (SSB) was 10 times higher than the historical low.

The updated stock assessment by the ISC in 2024 confirmed that:

- i. The stock has recovered to 144,000 tons (23.2% SSB0) and achieved the second rebuilding target (20% SSB0) in 2021 earlier than the target year.
- ii. The stock is not overfished relative to the biomass-based limit reference points adopted for other species in WCPFC (20% SSB0)
- iii. The stock is not subject to overfishing relative to some of the F-based reference points proposed for tuna species, including SPR 20%.

With the recovery of Pacific bluefin tuna stocks, in 2024, the WCPFC and IATTC decided to increase the catch quota (large fish +50%, small fish +10%) at a level maintained at the increasing stock trend. There is a possibility that the expansion of Pacific bluefin tuna distribution will lead to new fishing opportunities for Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing vessels, and it may lead to unexpected overfishing. In the absence of robust management measures to address the impact of IUU fishing, WWF remains deeply concerned that overfishing will occur again exposing this stock to the risk of collapse.

WWF recommends that IATTC:

- i. Complete the Management Strategy Evaluation with precautionary limit and target reference points for Pacific bluefin tuna by 2025.
- ii. Develop detailed measures and work plans for monitoring, control, and surveillance of Pacific bluefin tuna. In particular, establish standardized reporting procedures for bycatch and discards, and strengthen reporting and monitoring of caging at farms.
- iii. Develop and adopt a Catch Documentation Scheme by 2026 as a measure to improve the accuracy of stock assessments and reduce the risk of IUU fishing by strengthening monitoring of Pacific bluefin tuna, and
- iv. Improve transparency in Pacific bluefin tuna fisheries by the phase in of 100% observer (human or electronic) on all industrial vessels targeting or catching Pacific bluefin tuna. IATTC has adopted minimum standards for electronic monitoring systems that offer a good alternative to increasing human observer coverage.



### 3. South Pacific albacore tuna conservation

The benchmark assessment conducted by the IATTC and the Pacific Community (SPC) suggests that the South Pacific albacore stock is healthy, and the recent fishing mortality is much lower than the fishing mortality at MSY, and in coordination with WCPFC, a process has been initiated towards the establishment of a joint working group on South Pacific albacore.

With this background, the recommendations from WWF are as follows:

- i. Continue collaborating with SPC to monitor the stock status of South Pacific albacore tuna
- ii. Establish a joint working group with WCPFC in order to facilitate coordinated management strategies for the South Pacific albacore tuna.

### 4. FAD Management

WWF acknowledges the efforts of the IATTC CPCs to improve the management of the FAD fishery. In addition to these efforts, there is however an urgent need to adopt a comprehensive management strategy for FADs that incorporates monitoring, management, and control components. In this context, WWF urges IATTC members to do the following:

- i. Develop and adopt a FAD marking scheme, which requires marking the buoy and FAD structure.
- ii. Adopt clearer rules on FAD ownership.
- iii. Require activation of operational buoys, as defined by the joint tuna RFMO FAD 2019 meeting, occur exclusively onboard prior to deployment and develop clear rules for deactivation of FAD buoys at sea.
- iv. Develop and adopt an effective and completely transparent FAD recovery policy.
- v. Develop and implement science-based FAD set limits that are consistent with management objectives for tropical tunas and also establish science-based limits to reduce the total number of FADs deployed per vessel.

### 5. Observer coverage and electronic monitoring for longline vessels over 20 meters in length and small purse-seine vessels.

The 5% coverage of observers in the longline fleet is too low for an accurate estimate of catches of rare species such as sharks and sea turtles. Additionally, the non-coverage of observers in purse seine vessels smaller than Class 6 does not allow the improvement of the assessments of tropical tuna stocks, which consequently weakens the capacity of the scientific staff to present better scientific advice to the members of the Commission. In addition, major buyers in key markets are requiring RFMOs to phase in 100% observer coverage on all industrial tuna vessels.

WWF recommends the IATTC to phase in 100% observer coverage over the next three years that requires at least 20% observer coverage (human and electronic) by 2026 on purse-seine vessels of less than 363 tonnes carrying capacity that normally do not have observer coverage on board and for all longline vessels of more than 20 m in length. As recommended by the scientific staff, the increase in data collection and reporting will strengthen stock assessments and improve knowledge of the impact of these fishing vessels on IATTC stocks.



## 6. Shark Conservation

WWF is concerned by the conservation status of sharks - both globally and in the region - and asks the IATTC to quickly implement the recommendations of its scientific staff so that all fleets operating in the Eastern Pacific improve the collection of shark fishery data. This is particularly necessary so that conventional stock assessments and/or other indicators of stock condition can be developed to better inform the management of the various shark species. The Commission should place particular emphasis on improving catch data collection for CITES-listed species, such as hammerheads and silky sharks.

WWF additionally encourages IATTC to adopt shark handling and release best practice guidelines proposed by the scientific staff.

WWF reminds the IATTC to ensure compliance with the existing shark finning resolution and calls on the IATTC to strengthen the finning resolution and to enforce it by requiring all sharks to be landed with their fins naturally attached to the body.

Finally, WWF recommends that the IATTC prepare non-detriment findings reports (NDFs) for the areas within its jurisdiction for oceanic sharks and rays listed in Appendix II of CITES, when the intention of the contracting parties is to fish and commercialize their products legally and sustainably and agree to protocols to authorize national CITES exports based on these NDFs.



## 7. Seabirds Conservation

WWF recommends reviewing Resolution C-11-02 so that it is consistent with current knowledge regarding seabird mitigation techniques described in document EB-03-03. The two-column menu system in C-11-02 should be replaced with the requirement to use the three mitigation methods (weighted lines, night sets, and bird-scaring lines) in combination in such a way that they satisfy the requirements recommended by ACAP and BirdLife International.

WWF also recommends adopting the interim best practice handling and release guidelines available in document EB-03-06 for all the IATTC fisheries.



## 8. Sea turtle Conservation

A revised resolution on sea turtles (C-19-04) came into force on January 1, 2021, requiring tuna fisheries in the Eastern Pacific to implement several measures aimed at reducing sea turtle bycatch, particularly use of circle hooks and fish bait in shallow longline sets.

Recently, an expansion of a collaborative research project (BYC-11-02) between the IATTC and the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles employed an improved EASIFish model approach as an alternative means of assessing vulnerability status and simulate conservation and management measures that can mitigate the risks imposed by fishing on the critically endangered eastern Pacific leatherback turtle population. WWF supports the conservation measures proposed in the study, which include the use of circle



hooks, fish bait, and best handling and release practices, to reduce leatherback mortality, and calls on member countries of the Commission that operate longline fleets to adopt them as soon as possible.

## 9. Address Fleet Over Capacity

Fleet overcapacity is the biggest threat to the stocks of tropical tunas and vulnerable bycatch species in the EPO. WWF has continued to emphasize that current fleet capacity in the EPO is nearly double the IATTC's target level. Authorized vessels' increased sets, use of more-efficient FADs, and/or replacement of existing, older vessels with more efficient ones will further intensify this fishing pressure. Clearly, there is an urgent need to reduce overcapacity in order to ensure the health of tropical tuna stocks and to secure the future of the industry dependent on these fisheries.

To address these issues, WWF has repeatedly requested for IATTC member states to finalize a management plan to eliminate overcapacity in its convention area, and WWF urges the IATTC to adopt initial measures at this year's annual meeting. WWF calls attention to two proposals sent in previous years by the delegations of the European Union and Japan, scientific reports prepared by the Commission and other reports such as those prepared by WWF and IATTC. These proposals provide substantive frameworks to resume deliberations and set initial measures at this year's meeting. Hence, we recommend that IATTC develop and adopt a plan to reduce and eventually eliminate overcapacity in the purse seine fleet operating in the IATTC convention area.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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