

INTER-AMERICAN TROPICAL TUNA COMMISSION

104th MEETING

Lisbon, Portugal August 31 - September 4, 2026

PROPOSAL IATTC-104 X-1

**SUBMITTED BY BELIZE, COSTA RICA, EL SALVADOR, GUATEMALA,
HONDURAS, NICARAGUA AND PANAMA**

ESTABLISHMENT AND BEGINNING OF THE COASTAL EPO SCIENTIFIC PROGRAM AS A COMPONENT OF IATTC'S SCIENTIFIC WORK

Explanatory memorandum

The Antigua Convention consolidated a scientific and management mandate that requires the Commission to consider not only the status of target species, but also the effects of fishing on associated and dependent species, marine biodiversity, and ecosystem integrity. The progressive development of reports on ecosystem considerations, ecosystem indicators, ecological risk assessments, and oceanographic analyses demonstrates that the IATTC already has a sufficient scientific basis to move towards a more systematic integration of these lines of work.

The COASTAL EPO Scientific Program responds to that evolution. Its purpose is to organize, within the ordinary work of the Commission, a functional analysis platform that integrates oceanographic, ecological, and fisheries information relating to the eastern margin of the Tropical Pacific, including processes such as the Tehuantepec, Papagayo, and Panama upwellings, the Costa Rica Thermal Dome, regional current systems, mesoscale eddies, and transition zones between coastal and oceanic waters. These processes influence primary productivity, the availability of prey organisms, the distribution of highly migratory species, and the location of fishing effort.

The proposal does not create a new spatial planning category, does not delimit a regulatory area, does not prejudice the need to adopt future measures, nor does it establish additional obligations for Members. Its scope is strictly scientific. The COASTAL EPO delimitation will be functional, dynamic, and revisable, and will only serve to improve the analytical capacity of scientific staff, strengthen ecosystem indicators, enrich ecosystem considerations reports, and support ecological risk assessments.

The Program must be incorporated into the existing scientific procedures at IATTC. Its methodologies, hypotheses, databases, products, and recommendations will be subject to the same technical rigor, quality control, scientific review, consideration by the Scientific Advisory Committee, and approval by the Commission as any other scientific process carried out by the organization. No product of the Program may be presented as an institutional recommendation or basis for a regulatory measure without having followed those procedures.

To protect the Commission's ordinary budget, it is proposed that the operational start of the Program be conditional upon obtaining external resources from voluntary contributions from Members, Cooperating Non-Members, international organizations, academic institutions, foundations, or other sources compatible with IATTC policies. The resolution instructs the Director to manage these resources, present a specific work plan and budget, and avoid any impact on the Commission's fees, approved programs, or ordinary resources.

The adoption of this resolution will allow for the orderly, prudent, and financially responsible initiation of an integrated scientific approach that will strengthen the advice provided to the SAC and the Commission, improve

the understanding of the ecological processes that support fisheries in the Eastern Pacific, and expand the capacity of the IATTC to practically apply the ecosystem approach provided for in the Antigua Convention.

The Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) meeting in the city of Lisbon, Portugal, on its 104th Meeting:

REMEMBERING that the Antigua Convention aims to ensure the long-term conservation and sustainable use of the fish stocks covered by the Convention, in accordance with the relevant rules of International Law, and confers on the Commission scientific, technical, regulatory, cooperative, and administrative functions to achieve that objective;

REAFFIRMING that the Commission should adopt measures based on the best available scientific information and consider the effects of fishing on associated or dependent species and on ecosystems;

RECOGNIZING the scientific expertise accumulated by the IATTC over more than seventy years in research, data collection, stock assessment, oceanographic analysis, and advice for the conservation and management of Eastern Pacific fisheries;

OBSERVING that the Commission has progressively incorporated Ecosystem Indicators, Ecosystem Considerations Reports, ecological risk assessments, and other analyses intended to support the application of the ecosystem approach;

CONSIDERING that the Tehuantepec, Papagayo, and Panama upwellings, the Costa Rica Thermal Dome, regional current systems, mesoscale eddies, oceanographic fronts, and other dynamic structures influence biological productivity and the distribution of species and fisheries covered by the Convention;

RECOGNIZING FURTHERMORE that the integration of oceanographic, ecological, and fisheries information at a functional scale can strengthen the Commission's interpretation of indicators, risk assessments, and scientific analyses;

BEARING IN MIND that the COASTAL EPO concept has been formulated as a functional, dynamic, and exclusively scientific unit of analysis within the Convention Area, and not as a political, jurisdictional, or regulatory delimitation;

UNDERLINING that the Program should not create a new independent institutional line but rather integrate and strengthen existing scientific activities under the direction of IATTC's scientific staff;

AFFIRMING that all methodologies, hypotheses, delimitations, indicators, databases, reports, or recommendations derived from the Program must be subject to the ordinary procedures of quality, scientific review, consideration by the Scientific Advisory Committee, and ultimate decision by the Commission;

RECOGNIZING that the approval of the Program does not prejudge its scientific results, nor does it imply an advance assessment of the advisability of adopting new conservation and management measures;

CONSIDERING that the initial implementation can rely primarily on existing data, analytical capabilities, and scientific programs without automatically generating new information collection obligations for Members;

HIGHLIGHTING the desirability of developing an initial work cycle that allows establishing a baseline, testing indicators, evaluating their usefulness, and progressively determining the added value of the Program;

AWARE of the need to protect the Commission's ordinary budgetary resources and prevent the establishment of the Program from affecting quotas, approved activities, or current financial commitments;

RECOGNIZING that voluntary contributions and external cooperation can facilitate the development of the Program, provided that scientific independence, financial transparency, and the Commission's authority over its products and priorities are maintained;

DETERMINED to establish a clear scientific, operational, and financial framework to initiate the COASTAL EPO Program in a gradual, rigorous, and responsible manner;

AGREES:

I. ESTABLISHMENT, PURPOSE, AND NATURE

1. To establish the COASTAL EPO Scientific Program as a functional component of the IATTC's scientific work, intended to integrate oceanographic, ecological, and fisheries information relevant to the stocks and fisheries covered by the Antigua Convention.
2. The overall objective of the Program is to strengthen the Commission's capacity to analyze the relationships between oceanographic processes, biological productivity, species distribution, ecological interactions, and the distribution of fishing effort on the eastern margin of the Tropical Pacific.
3. To confirm that the Program is of an exclusively scientific nature and does not constitute a new management area, a conservation measure, a jurisdictional delimitation, or a spatial category with regulatory effects.
4. To establish that all delimitation used by the Program will be preliminary, functional, dynamic, revisable, and based on objective and reproducible scientific criteria.
5. To stipulate that the approval of the Program does not prejudice its results, nor does it imply an early conclusion on the need, sufficiency, modification, or future adoption of conservation and management measures.

II. INTEGRATION INTO THE SCIENTIFIC WORK OF THE IATTC

6. To incorporate the Program into the Commission's regular scientific activities and under the direction of IATTC's scientific staff, avoiding the creation of parallel or independent structures.
7. To guide the Program to strengthen, as appropriate, ecosystem indicators; ecosystem considerations reports; ecological risk assessments; assessments of target, related, and associated species; and other analyses approved by the Commission.
8. To require that the Program uses existing information, available databases, installed analytical capabilities, and results of ongoing scientific programs as a priority.
9. To establish that any proposal for additional data collection, modification of forms, establishment of reporting obligations, or mandatory participation of Members will require scientific consideration and express approval of the Commission.
10. To ensure that the products of the Program are integrated, where appropriate, into the ordinary reports and documents submitted to the Scientific Advisory Committee and the Commission.

III. SCIENTIFIC RIGOR AND APPROVAL PROCEDURES

11. To subject the hypotheses, methods, models, indicators, delimitations, databases, and products of the Program to the same standards of rigor, transparency, documentation, reproducibility, quality control, and review applicable to any other scientific process of the IATTC.
12. To require that data sources, assumptions, uncertainties, limitations, and interpretation criteria be clearly identified in all scientific products.
13. To arrange for the results to be submitted to internal review by the scientific staff and subsequently presented to the Scientific Advisory Committee for their examination, comments, and recommendations.

14. To establish that no conclusion, indicator, delimitation, or product of the Program will have the nature of an IATTC institutional recommendation until it has been considered in accordance with the ordinary scientific and decision-making procedures of the Commission.
15. To ensure that any eventual conservation and management recommendations derived from the Program are formulated separately, supported by the best available scientific information and subject to the exclusive decision of the Commission.

IV. INITIAL COMPONENTS AND PRODUCTS

16. To guide the initial phase of the Program towards the characterization of physical oceanography, biological productivity, distribution of target, related and associated species, fishing activity, and relevant ecosystem indicators.
17. To request the scientific staff to prepare, as initial products, an inventory of available data, a methodological proposal for functional delimitation, an ecosystem baseline, and a first set of pilot indicators.
18. To consider a scientific COASTAL EPO atlas, an integrated geospatial database, thematic reports, regional indicators, and support modules for ecological risk assessments as progressive development products
19. To stipulate that product design should consider its usefulness for advising the Scientific Advisory Committee and the Commission, as well as its compatibility with existing scientific systems and methodologies.
20. To request that at the end of each phase a technical evaluation be carried out on the quality, usefulness, costs, risks, limitations, and added value of the products developed.

V. FINANCING AND BUDGETARY SAFEGUARDS

21. To instruct the Director not to commit or affect the resources of the Commission's ordinary budget to initiate or execute the Program, unless the Commission subsequently adopts an express decision to the contrary.
22. To condition the operational start of the Program on obtaining sufficient external resources from voluntary contributions from Members, Cooperating Non-Members, international organizations, academic institutions, foundations, or other sources compatible with the rules and policies of the Commission.
23. To instruct the Director to actively manage these contributions and opportunities for cooperation, preserving scientific independence, transparency, institutional neutrality, and the Commission's authority over the priorities and outcomes of the Program.
24. To require that all external financing be recorded and managed separately, in a traceable and auditable manner, and identified in the relevant financial and performance reports.
25. To prohibit external contributions from influencing scientific results, methodologies, species selection, delimitations, recommendations, or decisions of the Commission.
26. To stipulate that no activity be initiated if the resources obtained are insufficient to cover its direct and administrative costs or if its execution could displace essential human resources from already approved priority programs.

VI. DIRECTOR'S FUNCTIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

27. Once sufficient external resources have been secured, to instruct the Director to present to the Scientific Advisory Committee and the Commission an initial implementation plan that includes objectives, activities, timeline, products, responsible parties, budget, sources of financing, performance indicators, and risk control measures.

28. To authorize the Director to establish technical or administrative agreements to receive cooperation, subject to the rules of the Commission and without assuming unauthorized financial, regulatory, or institutional obligations.
29. To request the Director to promote the voluntary participation of Members, scientific institutions, universities, and experts, when it provides technical value and maintains the scientific leadership of the IATTC.
30. To require the Director to promptly inform the Members about the resources obtained, the associated conditions, the activities initiated, and any financial, scientific, or institutional risks identified.

VII. MONITORING, REVIEW, AND CONTINUITY

31. To request that scientific staff submit progress reports to the Scientific Advisory Committee with a frequency consistent with the phases and products of the Program.
32. To require the Director to present to the Commission, at its annual meeting, a consolidated report on the technical and financial execution, the products obtained, the use of external resources, and the recommendations for the following period.
33. To stipulate that the Scientific Advisory Committee periodically evaluate the scientific utility of the Program and formulate recommendations on its continuation, adjustment, expansion, suspension, or termination.
34. To establish that the continuation of each phase will depend on the availability of external resources, compliance with scientific standards, and a favorable assessment of the results achieved.
35. To review the Program comprehensively at the end of its first phase or, at the latest, three years after the effective start of its implementation, whichever occurs first.
36. To confirm that any decision to convert Program products into permanent tools, new data obligations, ordinary budgetary activities, or organizational proposals will require express approval from the Commission.

FINAL PROVISION

This Resolution shall enter into force upon its adoption. The operational start of the Program will only occur when the Director certifies to the Members that sufficient external resources are available and that the proposed implementation will not affect the ordinary budget, fees, or priority scientific activities previously approved by the Commission.