

THE INTER-AMERICAN TROPICAL TUNA COMMISSION

103rd MEETING

**Panama City, Panama
01-05 September 2025**

DOCUMENT IATTC-103-02

**REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE 16th MEETING OF THE SCIENTIFIC
ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

1. TROPICAL TUNAS
That the Commission consider taking actions bearing in mind, among other elements, the measures proposed by the scientific staff described in document SAC-16-11.
1.1. Bigeye tuna
(a) That the Commission consider instructing that the candidate harvest strategy for bigeye tuna, described in document SAC-16-11 – Staff Recommendations 2025 (prepared in compliance with paragraph 8 of Resolution C-24-01; see also document SAC-16-06), be tested as a candidate rule in the management strategy evaluation process in 2025-2026 alongside other proposed candidates (see the report of the 1st meeting (Informal) of the Ad Hoc Working Group on MSE) and that the performance results be reviewed and analyzed by the Ad hoc Working Group on Management Strategy Evaluation (WGMSE)..
(b) That the Commission consider requesting the WGMSE to submit its recommendations to the Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) in 2026 for adoption of an MSE-tested management procedure/harvest strategy so that the SAC may formulate the corresponding proposals to the Commission, without excluding that their implementation may take place in any of the years of the current management cycle adopted by Commission.
(c) That the IATTC scientific staff provide the CPCs, by correspondence, at least 30 days prior to the next annual meeting of the Commission, with a technical analysis of the impact of catches by class 4 vessels on the bigeye tuna stock and juvenile yellowfin tuna.
(d) That, taking into account the multispecies nature of the IATTC tropical tuna fisheries, the scientific staff also evaluate the potential impacts of the implementation of catch strategies for bigeye tuna on the other tropical tuna stocks caught by the IATTC tropical tuna fisheries,

1.2. Yellowfin tuna
That the IATTC staff continue with, and the Commission support, the yellowfin tuna (YFT) research plan, especially with regards to YFT stock structure in the Eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO).
2. TEMPERATE TUNAS
2.1. Pacific Bluefin tuna
Considering that the SAC endorsed the Staff recommendations on Pacific bluefin tuna in document SAC16-11, that the Commission consider taking actions such as resolutions or recommendations based on these recommendations.
2.2. South Pacific albacore tuna
(a) That the Commission encourage CPCs to participate in the IATTC-WCPFC Joint Working Group on the Management of South Pacific Albacore Tuna, once it is established.
(b) That the IATTC Staff continue to collaborate with the Pacific Community (SPC) to monitor the stock status of South Pacific albacore tuna.
2.3. North Pacific albacore tuna
(a) That the Commission, when updating the harvest strategy, note that the change in fishing intensity can potentially be translated into catch and effort measures according to the relationships described in document SAC-15 INF-T.
(b) That the Commission consider the criteria developed by the ISC ALBWG for identifying exceptional circumstances for North Pacific albacore tuna (see document SAC-15 INF-S).
3. MANAGEMENT STRATEGY EVALUATION (MSE)
That the IATTC scientific staff expand the MSE work to test candidate harvest strategies for both purse-seine and longline fisheries, to assist the Commission with the implementation of a procedure for the management of tropical tunas and ensure balance among different fisheries.
4. DATA COLLECTION AND PROVISION
4.1. Tuna Tagging
(a) That the Commission support and prioritize the development of the tropical tuna tagging project in the EPO and recommend its implementation (see document SAC-16 INF-E.b).
(b) That the scientific staff submit to the Commission, at its next annual meeting, alternative proposals to the current design of the tropical tuna tagging programme, giving priority to cost-efficient schemes that allow scientific objectives to be achieved and reduce the risk of failure in future baseline assessments, especially for skipjack and yellowfin tuna.
4.2. Longline data reporting

That the Commission consider amending Resolution C-03-05 to enable the IATTC scientific staff to access operational set by set level logbook data from the longline fleet, or at a minimum, data aggregated at a 1 by 1 degree spatial resolution by vessel, month, and hooks per basket (or hooks between floats) for the construction of abundance indices and other useful information for stock assessments of tropical and temperate tunas. This may be currently achieved through a memorandum of understanding between the CPCs and the IATTC to make the data available during the development of the stock assessment.

6. ECOSYSTEM CONSIDERATIONS

6.1. Elasmobranchs (sharks and rays)

As a follow-up to its recommendation as adopted by the Commission, the SAC endorses the list of 7 ray species as recommended by the IATTC staff in the context of Paragraph f) Article VII of the Antigua Convention (see document SAC-16-08 Ray species under the purview of the IATTC).

6.2. Pilot Study for shark release devices

- (a) With the aim of strengthening efficient and safe mechanisms for the handling and release of sharks, it is recommended that the scientific staff, in collaboration with researchers associated with CPCs, continue to evaluate through a controlled pilot study the use of specific tools such as Velcro and harnesses and associated protocols for lifting large sharks from the caudal peduncle (except for whale sharks).
- (b) It is suggested that this pilot study be designed with a rigorous experimental approach, in line with the objective of determining the effectiveness and safety of these tools, the survival of individuals, and the safety of the crew and it is considered essential to include the fishing industry and specialists with experience in the handling and tagging of large sharks
- (c) It is recommended that the scientific staff submit the results of the pilot study to the Working Group on Ecosystem and Bycatch (WGECB) and the SAC for consideration as a possible good practice for the management and release of incidentally caught sharks, in order to contribute to their survival.
- (d) Given that the conduct of this study could be subject to restrictions arising from existing measures, the SAC requests the Commission to clarify whether this pilot study could be carried out and under what circumstances, and consequently consider, if necessary, an update of Resolution C-24-05 on sharks to that effect.

6.3. Sorting grids

That the Director, in coordination with interested CPCs, organize a second regional workshop on the use of tuna sorting grids to consider all relevant information presented in document SAC-16 INF-M and existing literature, and ensure the participation of all relevant stakeholders, including global experts, fishermen, fleet owners, and net engineers and manufacturers.

7. CLIMATE CHANGE

- (a) That the Commission consider for adoption the list of revised IATTC staff recommendations of the main goal, scope, and framework (see document SAC-16 INF-P) of the IATTC's proposed climate change workplan (document SAC-15-12).

(b) That the Commission consider adopting the Terms of References proposed by the IATTC staff (see document IATTC-102 INF-B) to guide the series of climate change workshops aimed to facilitate staff and stakeholder engagement during the development of the proposed climate change workplan (document SAC-15-12).

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE 9th MEETING OF THE AD HOC WORKING GROUP ON FADS AS ENDORSED BY THE SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Consistent with its terms of reference established in Resolution C-19-01, Annex III, **the Ad Hoc Permanent Working Group on FADs**, in reporting to the Scientific Advisory Committee on the results of its 9th meeting, and in the framework of the process of coordination with that Committee and with the scientific staff in the identification and review of feasible FAD management measures, as a preliminary step prior to the presentation of recommendations to the Commission, **wishes to recommend that:**

1. On FAD data reporting

1.1. The IATTC scientific staff develop and propose improvements to the characterization of the causes for remote deactivation and reactivation established in Resolution C-24-01.

1.2. The IATTC scientific staff analyze in greater detail the data from observers and satellite buoys to propose methods to help adequately evaluate the uses/record of the causes for remote deactivation and reactivation to identify possible opportunities for improvement or updates.

2. On FAD fishery indicators

2.1. The IATTC scientific staff continue to refine the indicators, including additional indicators of interest (e.g., last buoy positions, quantification of strandings and collection of stranded buoys) and prepare a guide with a description of each indicator that facilitate the interpretation and assessment of the implications of each indicator.

2.2. The Commission consider urging flag CPCs to ensure that fishing companies and buoy suppliers provide the IATTC with available historical information on vessel acoustic buoys received from the original users, including trajectory and biomass information, to prevent losing this data of enormous value to science, and particularly to stock assessments. The processing of this data will be subject to the Commission's rules on confidentiality

3. On biodegradable FADs

- 3.1. The SAC recommend that the Commission consider adopting measures to obtain the necessary data and resources, including by exploring strategic partnerships and alternative sources of funding, to enable analysis to be carried out to determine more accurately the final destination of unrecovered FADs.
- 3.2. Progress be made in analyzing the useful life of biodegradable FADs (“BioFAD”), or that, in addition to the information provided by observers in the EPO, the IATTC scientific staff provide the Group with a more in-depth analysis, taking into account the information on the positions of buoys associated with FADs as well as relevant information from WCPFC observers.
- 3.3. The IATTC scientific staff continue to deepen their analysis of the useful life of BioFADs in collaboration with the industry.
- 3.4. (a) Interested parties be encouraged to continue pursuing technical studies on biodegradable, natural, or bio-based materials, useful for the construction of FADs,
(b) The exchange of experiences be promoted through participatory workshops.
- 3.5. The IATTC scientific staff present to the Working Group an analysis derived from the compilation and evaluation of the certification options for bio-based materials which are used in FADs, and which will ensure that the new material and the final product do not contribute to the pollution of the marine environment.
- 3.6. CPCs and other entities be encouraged to engage in BioFADs trials provide more BioFAD data from broader regions of the EPO in a random fashion more adequate to making scientific comparisons.

4. On the FAD register

- (a) Considering the review of the suitability of a FAD Registry in the IATTC area, no need has been identified by the Working Group to implement such a registry in the region
- (b) The pros and cons of the implementation of different methods for marking FADs be explored.

5. On FAD retrieval

- 5.1. (a) The SAC consider the relevance of recommending to the Commission that it assess the value of adopting the form and database for collecting data on stranded FADs to be developed by the scientific staff, as harmonized as appropriate with the form developed by the SPC-WCPF, including the identification of possible adjustments.
(b) if a form is adopted for this purpose, its use be preceded by some type of workshop or practical training
- 5.2. The SAC consider the relevance of recommending to the Commission to evaluate or assess the adoption of the creation of stranding data collection programs as well as the analysis of the convenience and operability of a network of these programs in the EPO.

- 5.3. The IATTC scientific staff, with the support of the FAD Working Group, work on the development of indicators to enable monitoring of the performance of FAD retrieval programs over time, to recommend improvements.
- 5.4. For the purpose of assisting in the retrieval of FADs and without prejudice to the active buoy limits established by the Commission, the scientific staff analyze ways to manage deactivations, such as consider expanding the areas for requiring buoy activations (i.e., par. 23 of C-24-01) to assist with FAD recoveries, with the understanding that FADs south of 10° S and west of 100°W would not count towards active FAD limits.
- 5.5. The Commission consider assessing the value of establishing an incentive system for CPCs to establish funds to support projects and entities dedicated to the tracking, recovery, and retrieval of drifting FADs, in particular those with the highest risk of drifting into ecologically sensitive areas such as coral reefs and related shoreline habitats.
- 5.6. The Commission consider amending Resolution C-24-01, as appropriate, so that, to assist FAD recovery efforts, FAD satellite buoys that are deactivated pursuant to paragraph 23 of Resolution C-24-01 and drifting south of 10°S Latitude and west of 100°W maintain their signal active exclusively to transmit their position to FAD recovery programs, and remain excluded from buoy limits,, provided that sets on these FADs are prohibited for vessels registered with the IATTC, and they are only maintained active for scientific recovery and analysis purposes.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE 3rd MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP ON ECOSYSTEM AND BYCATCH AS ENDORSED BY THE SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE

PRELIMINARY NOTE

- (a) The Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) reviewed the report of the 3rd meeting of the Working Group on Ecosystem and Bycatch (EBWG), including its recommendations. Although SAC generally supported the recommendations, several suggestions and clarifications were raised and as a result SAC did not endorse the recommendations of EBWG3 as its entirety. Instead, SAC took all the recommendations from EBWG3, made necessary modifications, and adopted them as part of SAC recommendations.
- (b) The SAC noted that the Terms of Reference of EBWG (Resolution C-22-06) states that EBWG recommendations may be submitted to the Commission directly, whenever they could not be considered and/or endorsed by the SAC or upon the request of the Commission itself (para. 3ii).
- (c) Given that all the EBWG3 recommendations were reproduced as part of SAC recommendations with necessary modifications, the SAC agreed that it is not necessary for the original EBWG3 recommendations to be submitted to the Commission directly. The original EBWG3 report

including its recommendations can be found in its meeting website.

- (d) The SAC also noted that there is ambiguity in paragraph 3 of C-22-06 and, in fact, there were differences of opinion in its interpretation and implementation. The Commission may wish to clarify the intention of the said paragraph if deemed necessary.
- (e) One member did not agree with the interpretation that the EBWG could not send forward recommendations to the Commission in the present circumstance and considers provision to allow direct forwarding to Commission in event that SAC does not reach consensus on endorsement because one or members do not join consensus.

The EBWG recommends that:

1. Gear Innovation

The Commission consider requesting CPCs to make available to the SAC, through the IATTC Scientific Staff, any information they may have on the annular branches, including information on catch rates of target and non-target species, as well as other factors that can be used to assess this modification to longline fishing gear

2. Organization of workshops regarding Shark Conservation

The Commission consider instructing the Director to ensure that the scientific staff consider developing regional workshops for the exchange of data and information, with the aim of strengthening available scientific knowledge and promoting fisheries management practices based on results derived from population models, which contribute to the conservation of silky, blue, hammerhead and thresher sharks in the EPO.

3. Seabird Mitigation

The Commission consider requesting that the IATTC staff develop a seabird mitigation reporting template relative to compliance with Resolutions in force regarding mitigation measures for seabirds for consideration by the SAC, with due consideration to the operational feasibility of data collection.

4. Characterization and classification of longline fleets in the Antigua Convention area

The Commission consider recommending that the work initiated and described in document SAC-16-09 be continued, so that in coordination with the CPCs, field work and more precise evaluations on individual aspects of each fleet are carried out, distinguishing the different segments exclusively of the longline fleets targeting the species covered under the Antigua Convention.

5. Ecocards

The Commission consider the IATTC staff to continue collaborating with other tRFMOs to establish criteria for delineating ecoregions and to develop indicators, including socioeconomics.

6. Collection of shark information

The Commission consider continuing the process of collecting information in coordination with CPCs, in particular on mortality and utilization of sharks and other non-tuna species, relative to coastal fisheries in the EPO targeting species covered by the Antigua Convention, related to the Presentation “Considerations for an IATTC Shark Data Collection Program” (see Presentation 5c.iv).

7. Sea Turtles

7.1. **Circle Hook Minimum Size:**

Considering that both the GTECI and the SAC, in response to the Commission’s request regarding Resolution C-19-04, to determine a minimum size for large circle hooks, acknowledged that it is currently difficult to agree upon a single, appropriate minimum size, that the Commission consider urging each CPC to continue to collect information, in the format of their choice, on the size (including manufacturer standards) of circle hooks, impacts of circle hooks on target and non-target species (including catch rates and post-release mortality), and other relevant information, and report updates on this information to the IATTC scientific staff, through the Director, with a view to considering a comprehensive bycatch management strategy in the future, if possible.

7.2. **About a third mitigation option:**

The Commission consider recommending that the scientific staff of IATTC and the SAC develop, as necessary, alternatives for the development of a third mitigation option, taking into account the needs of the different fleets and the impacts on the different taxa, as well as measures that have proven to be effective in reducing sea turtle catches, and that do not affect the catch of the target species

7.3. **Best Handling and Release Practices for sea turtles:**

The Commission consider urging the EBWG, as soon as possible, if necessary, to make recommendations regarding the updating of best practice guidelines for sea turtle handling and release practices for all fisheries under the competence of the Commission.

Annex

Evaluation of the financial resources needed to implement specific recommendations as listed below

SAC-Recommendation 4.1.	Tuna tagging	1 st year US\$ 1,497,683 2 nd year US\$ 181,243 3 rd year US\$ 116,823
SAC-Recommendation 6.2.	Pilot Study for shark release devices	US\$ 175,000
SAC-Recommendation 6.3.	Sorting grids	US\$ 50,000
EBWG Recommendation 2	Organization of workshops regarding Shark Conservation	US\$ 30,000