



WWF

POSITION

2021



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Oceans Practice

WWF POSITION STATEMENT FOR THE 98TH MEETING OF THE INER-AMERICAN TROPICAL TUNA COMMISSION

August 23rd – August 27th, 2021

The COVID-19 pandemic presents unprecedented challenges to the fisheries sector in the Eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO), and the current circumstances have required that all IATTC meetings in 2020 and 2021 be held virtually. However, despite this, the IATTC must assume its responsibilities and take decisive actions to ensure good management and conservation of tuna stocks and other species in the EPO.

It is understandable, given these circumstances, that the Commission has prioritized issues on the agenda. Below, WWF highlights and critical issues that must be urgently addressed at the 98th meeting of the Commission.

1. Tropical Tuna Conservation

On 22 December, 2020, the 96th extraordinary meeting of the Commission was held, and resolution [C-20-06](#) was adopted to extend conservation measures in force for tropical tunas through 2021. At that time, the IATTC did not adopt the additional precautionary measures the scientific staff recommended based on the results of the latest yellowfin and bigeye stock

assessments.¹ In addition, the Commission's scientific staff expressed concern about an increase in fishing mortality.²

The IATTC SAC meeting in May 2021 recommended that the provisions of the current resolution (C-20-06) be maintained for the years 2022-2024, except those related to the FAD fishery, on which it recommends adopting measures that avoid exceeding the average fishing mortality of this fishery between the years 2017 and 2019. The SAC also recommended establishing a three-year management cycle for the tropical tuna fishery in the eastern Pacific and that the operational rule described in SAC-12-08 be adopted.³

Based on this background, WWF urges IATTC members to take action to ensure that the tropical tuna conservation measure that replaces C-20-06 is a multi-year (2022-2024) and effective plan to reduce the fishing mortality of bigeye and yellowfin tunas. The conservation measure, as recommended by the SAC and the scientific staff, should incorporate additional measures for the management of FADs, such as the operational rule to extend the closure, limits of active FADs per vessel not to exceed 100, limits for sets over FADs and free swimming schools, a five-year timeframe for the fleet to transition to nonentangling and biodegradable FADs and a clarification of the concepts of activation and deactivation of FADs. An additional conservation measure for consideration would be the substantial reduction in the catch of bigeye tuna, via the assignment of individual catch limits for bigeye tuna and yellowfin tuna per boat.

WWF also recommends that the assessment models that previously served as the basis for risk analysis continue to be improved upon, and that the staffs' stock assessment plan can be accelerated to have updated stock status indicators and stock evaluations for yellowfin and bigeye, and a new assessment for skipjack by 2023.

2. Review of Harvest Strategies

The implementation of precautionary fishing policies, guided by reference points and harvest control rules, allow managers to act swiftly and efficiently under a pre-agreed standard to ensure that catches do not exceed any acceptable limits. Thereby, this ensures the sustainability of the resource and the consistent supply of fish to our markets. The adoption of harvest control rules is a key aspect of modern fisheries management and is also a requirement for several ecolabel certification programs.

The current work undertaken by IATTC staff to conduct a management strategy evaluation (MSE) for tropical tunas in the EPO, planned to be finished by 2023, is key to informing Commission

¹ The results of these evaluations revealed that the yellowfin stock is in good condition, and for bigeye there is a 50% chance that overfishing is occurring and a 53% chance that the bigeye stock is overfished. As a result of these findings, the scientific staff recommended a set of additional measures to ensure that fishing mortality is not exceeded at or below the level corresponding to maximum sustainable yield (MSY).

² Increased fishing mortality is due to the long-term increasing trend of sets on floating objects (SAC-12-05), the direct relationship between fishing mortality of bigeye tuna and the number of sets on floating objects (presentation by Dr. Haykun Xu), and finally by the indicators of catch per set and average length of the three species of tropical tunas in the fishery on floating objects (SAC-12-05). This scenario, shown by these stock condition indicators, was maintained despite the 25% decline in fishing effort during 2020, particularly in use of FADs. In this atypical year, which according to scientists is not appropriate to make long term management advice, there was only a 6% decline in catches compared to the average of the last five years.

³ This is all a part of a package of possible measures that should be applied to adjust the duration of the closure within the management cycle, if required, based on a better scientific estimate of the total number of floating object sets in the previous year, combined with daily active FAD limits per vessel individual.

Members about the effectiveness of existing reference points and harvest control rules—compared to the alternatives—and helps guide the adoption of a permanent rule.

WWF urges the Commission to continue supporting efforts to accelerate the MSE process as several already-certified fisheries or fisheries under assessment depend on this process.

3. Management of Fleet Capacity

Fleet overcapacity is the biggest threat to the stocks of tropical tunas in the EPO. WWF notes with concern that the substantial growth of tuna purse seiners' fishing capacity over the last two decades has led to a current fleet capacity in the EPO that 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 urges them to adopt these 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. These proposals provide substantive frameworks to resume deliberations. Findings from studies by WWF and IATTC (Dale Squires) can inform these deliberations.

Implementing measures that take a stepwise approach or adopting measures that more rapidly reduce excess capacity are in the best interest of the Commission's objective to ensure the long-term sustainable use of fish stocks covered by the Antiqua Convention.

With this background, WWF asks the Commission that in 2022 the process of drawing up the plan to reduce fishing capacity in the Eastern Pacific be resumed.

4. Management of FADS

WWF recognizes the efforts of the IATTC CPCs to improve FAD management. In addition to these efforts however, there is an urgent need to adopt a comprehensive management strategy for these devices that incorporates monitoring, management, and control components. In this context WWF urges IATTC CPCs that by 2022 to:

- Provide the IATTC Secretariat with consistent satellite buoy data to understand FADs' movements and life cycles even those whose purse seine fleets infrequently interact with/deploy FADs. It should be the task of the Compliance Committee to ensure CPCs submit timely, consistent data, which is critical to improving stock assessments.
- Incorporate standards regarding the ownership and marking of these devices.
- Incorporate a clear mandate for fleets to transition to only the use of biodegradable FADs over the next five years. The Commission should adopt the definitions on fishing operations with FADs listed in [Annex 1 of the FADs working group report](#).
- Develop and adopt clear rules for activating FADs onboard (before placement on the water), and for deactivating buoys at sea.
- Develop and implement science-based FAD set limits consistent with management objectives for tropical tunas, and science-based limits on the overall number of active FADs deployed.

- Design FAD recovery programs that include incentives to participate.

5. Observer Coverage for Longline Vessels over 20m in Length and Small Purse Seine Vessels

The limited information provided by member nations' observer programs (under the framework of Resolution [C-19-08](#)) reveals that 5% observer coverage is too low to accurately estimate the catch of infrequently caught species. Additionally, it suggests that the non-coverage of observers in vessels smaller than Class 6 does not allow for improvement of the stock assessments of tropical tunas, which therefore weakens the capacity of the staff to present the best scientific advice to the members of the Commission.

WWF endorses the Commission to adopt the electronic monitoring (EM) system work plan detailed in document [EMS-01-02](#) as well as the ToR of the EM workshops to develop definitions and minimum standards for an electronic monitoring program for longline vessels and purse seiners.

WWF urges the IATTC to require by 2023 100% scientific/independent observer coverage (human and/or electronic) on purse seine vessels of < 363 t of carrying capacity that currently do not have an observer onboard. A good step in this direction is for the IATTC to adopt standards for electronic monitoring at its upcoming meeting. For longline vessels, WWF urges that by 2022 observer coverage be increased to at least 20%, as recommended by the Commission's scientific staff. Increased data collection and reporting will enrich stock assessments and improve knowledge of these fishing vessels' impact(s) on IATTC stocks.

6. IATTC Transparency

It is critical that the IATTC increases the transparency of its compliance assessment process. Members' responses to areas of identified non-compliance should be made public and included in the Review Committee report, along with details regarding each members' and cooperating non-members' areas of non-compliance and the recommendation(s) to address non-compliance.

We request that the IATTC set clear milestones for improving compliance by requiring cooperating parties to submit a compliance action plan for identified infractions. Additionally, we ask for the Commission to begin discussions on how it will respond to repeated and significant instances of non-compliance. The Review Committee needs to make information and action plans that address gaps in compliance publicly available. This in turn increases transparency and accountability, which can then engage stakeholders and generate a pool of resources and capabilities.

WWF urges the members and cooperating parties to ensure that their fleets and fisheries are free from slavery, forced labour, and poor labour conditions, and that they have appropriate measures in place to eliminate these practices.

7. FAO Port State Measures Agreement

The IATTC is the only RFMO to not have adopted port state measures at the regional level. WWF strongly supports developing harmonized port state measures that align with the 2009 FAO

Agreement on Port States Measures to prevent, deter, and eliminate illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing (FAO PSMA). The Agreement has proven to be a cost-effective tool to combat IUU fishing by banning those products from entering the market. For this reason, we support the proposed resolution presented by the EU to adopt in the IATTC a system of standards minimum for inspections in port and we urge cooperating parties to adopt it at the 98th annual meeting. WWF also asks all members who have not yet done so to ratify the 2009 FAO PSMA.

8. Shark Conservation

WWF, in complete compliance with Ecuadorian laws and international treaties ratified by Ecuador, categorically rejects every form of illicit use of biodiversity, such as the fishing of protected species or endangerment of Protected Areas. Therefore, WWF supports the prohibition of industrial fishing within the Galapagos Marine Reserve. WWF also supports the complete protection of sharks within this protected area, as well as the prohibition of targeted shark fishing in all Ecuadorian waters.

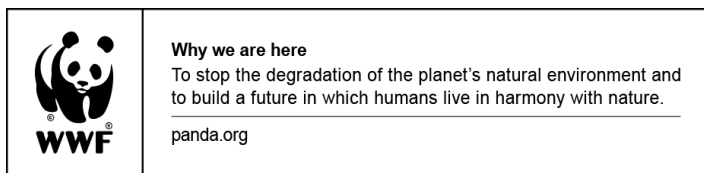
WWF urges the IATTC to promptly implement their scientific staffs' recommendations that all fishing fleets operating in the EPO improve shark fishery data collection. This is necessary so that conventional stock assessments and/or other indicators of stock status can be developed to better inform management of shark species ([DOCUMENT SAC-12-16](#)). The Commission should place special emphasis on improving data collection on the capture of CITES listed hammerhead sharks and silky sharks, as well as other sharks caught in coastal longline and gillnet fisheries, high-seas longline fisheries, and small-scale purse seine fisheries. It would be highly beneficial for the IATTC to develop a long-term sampling program for shark fisheries in Central America.

WWF further encourages the IATTC to adopt measures to mitigate the incidental catch and maximize the release survival of sharks. WWF reminds the IATTC to enforce the existing resolution on shark finning, and ask the IATTC to strengthen that resolution by requiring that all sharks be landed with fins naturally attached.

WWF also requests the IATTC to require vessel captains to complete the transshipment declaration forms from the Resolution [C-12-07](#) by species, for all shark catches.

Despite the global evidence from tuna fisheries suggests that prohibitions by themselves may not lead to shark and ray recoveries the IATTC, through its resolutions C-11-10 and C-15 -04, established a complete prohibition for the retention on board, unloading and commercialization in the eastern Pacific of oceanic whitetip shark (*Carcharhinus longimanus*) and Mobulidae rays (*Manta birostris*, *Mobula munkiana*, *Manta thurstoni*). With this background, WWF urges the IATTC to introduce by 2023, a recovery plan for the oceanic whitetip shark that is a species globally critically endangered, and by 2026, for all endangered oceanic rays enlisted before.

Finally, WWF recommends for the IATTC to conduct regional CITES Non-Detriment Finding (NDF) reports for the areas within their jurisdiction for transboundary oceanic shark and ray species listed on CITES App. II, where the intention of contracting parties is to fish and trade their products legally and sustainably and agreeing protocols for authorizing national CITES exports based on these NDFs.



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