

INTER-AMERICAN TROPICAL TUNA COMMISSION
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PROPOSAL IATTC-104 Q-1

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

**RESOLUTION ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE WORKING GROUP FOR
DIALOGUE AND SCIENTIFIC ANALYSIS OF BILLFISH OF THE INTER-AMERICAN
TROPICAL TUNA COMMISSION (IATTC)**

Explanatory memorandum

Billfish, taxonomically corresponding to the families **Istiophoridae** and **Xiphiidae** are among the most ecologically, economically, and socially important groups of highly migratory species in the eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO). These species are exploited by multiple fisheries operating throughout the region, including industrial longline and purse seine fleets, as well as small-scale coastal fisheries and recreational and sport fishing fleets. As apex predators and valuable fishery resources, billfish contribute significantly to the functioning of marine ecosystems, food security through small-scale fishing, the livelihoods of coastal communities, recreational and sport fishing, sustainable marine tourism, and the economic development of numerous Members and Cooperating Non-Members of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC).

The wide distribution of these species, their use by various fishing sectors, and the interest they generate in multiple national, regional, and international scientific institutions mean that their conservation and sustainable use increasingly benefit from solid, continuous, and effective scientific cooperation. In this context, strengthening the coordination of existing scientific capabilities is an essential element to improve the scientific advice that underpins the Commission's decisions.

Over the past few years, the CPCs, the scientific staff of the IATTC, academic institutions, and various regional scientific bodies have generated a valuable amount of information on the biology, ecology, and fisheries of billfish. However, significant challenges remain in integrating, harmonizing, and fully leveraging that knowledge at a regional scale. Information remains scattered among different fisheries, jurisdictions, and scientific initiatives, particularly in aspects related to catch and fishing effort, monitoring and verifiability of information due to the absence of independent mechanisms such as inspections and onboard observers, biological parameters, post-release mortality, and the contribution of artisanal, coastal, and sport fisheries. These constraints reduce the ability to develop increasingly robust scientific assessments and provide the Commission with the best available scientific advice.

Furthermore, several billfish populations are distributed beyond the Convention Area, highlighting the importance of maintaining and strengthening collaboration with relevant regional scientific mechanisms to improve knowledge of these highly migratory species. In this context, the present proposal recognizes and values the important contributions made by existing scientific structures, including, where appropriate, the International Scientific Committee for North Pacific Tuna and Related Species (ISC), and is based on the principle that it is important to make available to the

scientific staff of the IATTC external inputs derived from scientific information developed under qualified standards by external initiatives, promoting a more efficient use of available knowledge.

To this end, the establishment of the Scientific Dialogue and Analysis Working Group on Billfish of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) is proposed as a mechanism for scientific dialogue and analysis and technical exchange that facilitates the articulation between the CPCs, the scientific staff of the IATTC without replacing, overlapping, or conditioning the scientific work of the IATTC staff, academic institutions, and other relevant scientific experts and initiatives. Its main function shall be to facilitate scientific dialogue, identify common priorities, promote the exchange of information, and channel technical recommendations towards contributing to the Ecosystems and Bycatch Working Group (EBWG) and the Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC), strengthening coordination among existing scientific capacities, and contributing to a better integration of available knowledge to support the Commission's scientific process.

Hence, the establishment of the Working Group represents an opportunity to strengthen regional scientific cooperation, improve coordination among existing capacities, and consolidate a mechanism that facilitates the generation of increasingly integrated, transparent, and robust scientific advice to support the Commission's decisions on billfish in the eastern Pacific Ocean. By strengthening the interaction among the different stakeholders that generate scientific knowledge, this proposal seeks to contribute to the implementation of the Antigua Convention through a more efficient use of available knowledge and closer regional scientific collaboration for the benefit of the conservation and sustainable use of these highly migratory species, without altering the logical structure and the role given exclusively to the Director, the Scientific Staff, the Scientific Advisory Committee, and the Commission, in the liaison between science and management.

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

Recognizing that, like tuna, billfish are highly migratory species associated with tuna, widely distributed in the eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO), and are caught by a variety of fisheries, including industrial, small-scale, coastal, and sport fisheries carried out by various Members and Cooperating Non-Members of the Commission;

Recognizing also the ecological, economic, and social importance of billfish for numerous Members and Cooperating Non-Members of the Commission, including their contribution to food security, the livelihoods of coastal communities, recreational fishing, sustainable marine tourism, and the functioning of pelagic marine ecosystems;

Remembering that, in accordance with the Antigua Convention, the Commission must adopt its conservation and management measures based on the best available scientific information and promote the scientific cooperation necessary for the fulfillment of its objectives;

Recognizing that the Scientific Advisory Committee and the scientific staff of the IATTC play a fundamental role in developing the scientific advice that serves as the basis for the Commission's decisions;

Taking note that the available scientific information on billfish in the eastern Pacific Ocean remains incomplete and fragmented, particularly regarding catch and effort data, biological information, post-release mortality and the contribution of artisanal, coastal, and sport fisheries, limiting the development of increasingly robust scientific assessments;

Recognizing also the valuable contributions that CPCs, IATTC scientific staff, academic institutions, and other relevant scientific mechanisms make to improve knowledge on billfish, and highlighting the importance of strengthening scientific cooperation and information exchange among these existing capacities;

Recognizing that several billfish populations are distributed beyond the Convention Area and that strengthening collaboration with relevant regional scientific mechanisms contributes to improving scientific knowledge regarding these highly migratory species, including, where appropriate, the International Scientific Committee for North Pacific Tuna and Related Species (ISC);

Recognizing also that strengthening coordination among existing scientific capabilities shall facilitate the identification of common research priorities, promote a more efficient exchange of scientific information, and contribute to improving the scientific basis that supports the work of the Scientific Advisory Committee and of the Commission;

Considering that a dialogue mechanism that promotes scientific coordination within the institutional framework of the IATTC can contribute to more efficiently articulating existing scientific efforts, promoting complementarity among ongoing initiatives and fostering a more integrated use of available knowledge to support the Commission's scientific process;

Considering Article VII, paragraph 1(f), of the Antigua Convention, which provides that the Commission shall, as necessary, adopt measures and recommendations concerning species belonging to, or associated with or dependent on, the fish stocks covered by the Convention;

Agree to the following:

1. The Working Group on Billfish Science of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) (hereinafter, the "Working Group") is established as a consultative mechanism for scientific coordination of the Commission, intended to strengthen and generate technical inputs for the Ecosystems and Bycatch Working Group (EBWG).
2. The Working Group shall aim, through dialogue and integration of experiences, to strengthen scientific coordination among Members and Cooperating Non-Members of the Commission, IATTC scientific staff, scientific institutions, and other relevant experts; facilitate the exchange, integration, collection, and verification of information and the harmonization of available scientific information; identify common scientific priorities; and support IATTC scientific staff in strengthening the scientific basis for the conservation and sustainable use of billfish in the Convention Area.
3. The Working Group shall conduct its activities exclusively through dialogue that promotes scientific coordination. It shall act without detriment to or substitution of the functions, responsibilities, and mandates of the Commission, the Scientific Advisory Committee, the scientific staff of the IATTC, and other relevant regional scientific mechanisms.
4. In fulfilling its purpose, the Working Group shall facilitate scientific cooperation, promote the exchange, integration and analysis of available scientific information, identify common scientific priorities, and develop non-binding scientific and technical recommendations on billfish-related matters, which shall be submitted to the Ecosystems and Bycatch Working Group (EBWG) for consideration within the Commission's scientific process. In any case, the scientific staff shall not be conditioned by the inputs derived from the Working Group.

5. The Working Group shall carry out its activities regarding scientific matters related to the following billfish species present in the IATTC Convention Area:

Blue marlin (*Makaira nigricans*);
Black marlin (*Istiompax indicates*);
Striped marlin (*Kajikia audax*);
Swordfish (*Xiphias gladius*);
Shortbill spearfish (*Tetrapturus angustirostris*); and
Sailfish (*Istiophorus platypterus*).

The Commission may modify this list, as appropriate, by express decision based on the best available scientific advice.

6. The Working Group shall serve as a collaborative scientific forum in support of the IATTC scientific staff, to provide input to the Ecosystem and Bycatch Working Group (EBWG), and shall perform the following functions:

- a) Facilitate scientific dialogue among CPCs, IATTC scientific staff, academic institutions, other relevant regional scientific mechanisms, and invited experts, promoting knowledge exchange, identifying elements of complementarity among scientific initiatives, and the more efficient use of existing scientific capabilities.
- b) To promote the exchange, integration, harmonization, and analysis of available scientific information on billfish; to identify information gaps and common scientific priorities; and to encourage the development of harmonized scientific methodologies that strengthen the scientific basis for the conservation and sustainable use of these species, in accordance with the rules of confidentiality, access, use, and disclosure of data applicable in the IATTC. The Working Group shall have access to all publicly available information.
- c) To prepare and submit scientific and technical recommendations on billfish-related matters to the Ecosystem and Bycatch Working Group (EBWG) on scientific priorities, information needs, methodologies, scientific cooperation, and other matters within its mandate, for analysis and possible consideration in the Commission's scientific advice process.
- d) To promote, where appropriate, scientific cooperation activities, technical exchange, and capacity building among CPCs and other relevant scientific institutions, to strengthen the generation, integration, and application of scientific knowledge on billfish.
- e) To monitor the progress of the scientific priorities identified by the Working Group and to promote, where appropriate, coordination among CPCs, the scientific staff of the IATTC and other relevant scientific institutions to facilitate their development, avoiding duplication of efforts, promoting complementarity of existing scientific initiatives, and strengthening the scientific basis that supports the Commission's advisory process.

7. Participation in the Working Group shall be open to all Members and Cooperating Non-Members of the Commission (CPC). Each CPC may designate one or more representatives with experience in fisheries science, stock assessment, marine ecology, fisheries monitoring, data collection and analysis, fisheries management science, or other fields related to the mandate of the Working Group, as well as advisors in the fields that each CPC considers relevant. Participation shall be attributable to the CPC and not to its representatives individually.
8. The IATTC scientific staff shall participate in the activities of the Working Group and may provide scientific and technical support according to their priorities and availability to report on the work under their responsibility.
9. Duly accredited observers with the powers and rights inherent to that status may participate, in accordance with the IATTC Rules of Procedure. Participation shall be encouraged among representatives of the fishing sector involved in the fisheries under the jurisdiction of the IATTC, especially small-scale fishing.
10. The Working Group shall elect from among the representatives of the CPCs a Chairperson and a Vice-Chairperson for a two-year period, renewable only once.
11. The conclusions and recommendations of the Working Group shall be adopted by consensus. When it is not possible to reach that goal, the report shall reflect the different opinions expressed.
12. The Working Group shall prepare a report at the end of each meeting, reflecting the discussions, the progress achieved, the scientific priorities identified and, where appropriate, the scientific and technical recommendations formulated within the scope of its mandate. The report shall be submitted to the Ecosystem and Bycatch Working Group (EBWG).
13. The recommendations of the Working Group shall be advisory and non-binding.
14. Nothing in this Resolution modifies the competencies of the scientific staff or their fundamental role in the management of science within the framework of the Commission, which shall remain unaffected in accordance with the provisions of the Antigua Convention, nor does it modify the Scientific Advisory Committee or limit the power of the Commission to adopt the decisions it deems appropriate.
15. In carrying out its activities, the Working Group shall maintain effective coordination with the chairman of the EBWG and IATTC scientific staff.
16. IATTC staff shall provide the Working Group with the necessary technical and administrative support for the development of its activities, subject to the availability of resources approved by the Commission.
17. Due to its nature as a non-binding consultative dialogue, the Group's recommendations shall not have immediate effect for direct implementation without approval by the Commission. However, the Group may identify and make available to the Commission financial resources

from the CPCs or from scientific entities or fishers associations for the performance of scientific work relating to billfish, subject to the control and administration by the Director.

18. The Scientific Advisory Committee may periodically evaluate the functioning and results of the Working Group and, when appropriate, make recommendations to the Commission to strengthen its effectiveness, ensure its proper articulation with existing scientific mechanisms, and maintain consistency with the scientific needs of the Commission.
19. Nothing in this Resolution shall be construed as altering the powers of the Commission, the Scientific Advisory Committee, or the scientific staff of the IATTC, or as creating new obligations for CPCs other than those established by the Convention or by other decisions of the Commission.
20. The Working Group shall hold its meetings in person, in accordance with the Rules of Procedure and applicable practices of the Commission. Virtual or hybrid meetings may be held once the Commission has adopted or established the mechanisms, criteria, or procedures that allow for adequately addressing time zone differences and ensuring the effective participation of Members and Cooperating Non-Members.
21. This Resolution shall enter into force on the date of its adoption by the Commission.