INTER-AMERICAN TROPICAL TUNA COMMISSION

TECHNICAL EXPERTS WORKSHOP ON THE MANAGEMENT OF THE CAPACITY OF THE TUNA-FISHING FLEET IN THE EASTERN PACIFIC OCEAN

Cartagena de Indias, Colombia

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INTRODUCTION

The substantial growth of the fishing capacity of the tuna purse-seine fleet operating in the eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO) in the last two decades has led to the current capacity being considerably in excess of the recommended target level of 135,000 metric tons, equivalent to 158,000 cubic meters (m^3) of well volume, adopted by the Commission in August 2000. Therefore, the current level of capacity is greater than the optimal level required to sustainably harvest the tropical tuna resources in the EPO, taking into account the status of the stocks. The most recent assessments indicate that, with the 62-day closure and other restrictions, fishing mortality of the stocks of yellowfin and bigeye, two of the three main species, is near the levels corresponding to their respective fishing mortalities that would produce the maximum sustainable yields (MSYs)[1]. This situation is cause for concern, and since 2004 measures have been implemented to restrict purse-seine fishing effort, primarily by area closures, and also to limit longline catches of bigeye.

Several factors explain this growth in capacity. The tuna-canning industries developed recently by several coastal states require a constant supply of raw material, and the high price of tuna in the global market during the past twenty years, have both stimulated the entry of additional vessels to the fishery. Another important factor has been the increasing demand for skipjack, a relatively inexpensive species of tuna used for canning, which is abundant and easily caught using artificial floating objects (called "fish-aggregating devices", or FADs). The total catches of tropical tunas in the EPO have grown alongside the capacity of the fleet, due partly to a fuller use of historical fishing areas, and partly to the expansion of the fishery to new areas, most notably in the southern and equatorial EPO. Purse-seine catches of skipjack, which now form the largest portion of tuna catches from the EPO, have increased from 104,000 to 280,000 tons between 1982 and 2011.

Furthermore, several technical innovations have had important effects on the efficiency of the fleet in terms of fishing effort and its increase, in addition to providing more efficient access to the tuna resources in the new fishing areas. They include FADs, mentioned above, equipment such as echosounders and sonar for locating schools of tunas, determining their quantity and composition, and monitoring subsurface fishing gear, and navigational equipment such as GPS,

[1] See documents SAC-04-04b and SAC-04-05a

which allow the precise location of vessels and FADs to be determined. These new technologies have been incorporated into the EPO purse-seine fleet, complementing those already incorporated in the 1980s, such as helicopters and bird radar.

In 2005 the IATTC adopted a Plan for the Regional Management of Fishing Capacity. This Plan is a policy document that establishes a general framework for managing the capacity of the tuna fleets in the EPO. The management of fleet capacity through the Plan is meant to complement the other conservation and management measures taken pursuant to the Antigua Convention.

OBJECTIVES OF THE WORKSHOP

The main purpose of the workshop is to define, consistent with the 2005 Plan, an effective, equitable, and transparent scheme for managing and effectively reducing, in the medium term, the capacity of the EPO tuna-fishing fleet, including a timetable for the adoption and implementation of the scheme.

Participants, in their capacity as technical experts, should analyze ways and means of reducing the total capacity of the fleet to a level commensurate with the sustainability of the tuna resources, and propose appropriate actions to ensure that such a reduction is achieved and to avoid further growth in the capacity of the fleet.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

1. SAC-04-INF B: *Managing fishing capacity: an economic approach*; 4th Meeting of the Scientific Advisory Committee, May 2013.
2. SAC-04-INF D: *Management options: total allowable catch (TAC) scheme*. 4th Meeting of the Scientific Advisory Committee May 2013.
3. Plan for regional management of fishing capacity, June 2005.
4. IATTC-85 PROP H-2 JPN Capacity management
   IATTC-85 PROP H-1 EU Fleet Capacity

For detailed information about the fleet, see the IATTC Regional Vessel Register