



WWF

POSITION

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Eschban Barera / WWF-Ecuador

Oceans Practice

WWF POSITION STATEMENT FOR THE 100TH MEETING OF THE INTER-AMERICAN TROPICAL TUNA COMMISSION

August 1 – August 5, 2022

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) thanks the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) for the opportunity to attend the 100th regular session as an observer.

WWF recognizes that COVID-19 had impacted the fishing sector, as the pandemic generated a justified concern about the health of the people associated with this important value chain and caused the meetings during the years 2020 and 2021 to be held virtually. WWF is optimistic that the adaptation to remote meetings and resumption of in person meetings will allow IATTC member countries to make rapid progress on measures to support the recovery of marine wildlife in the region, and maintain and expand their commitment to responsible management, a necessary condition for achieving sustainable fishing. WWF believes this is vital, since tuna in the Eastern Pacific Ocean supports a fishing industry that sustains the livelihoods of tens of thousands of people and contributes to economic growth and social development in the region. WWF's recommendations for the 100th Annual Meeting of the IATTC are summarized as follows:

- i. **Tropical Tunas:** The IATTC scientific staff, in coordination with the CPCs, adequately implement the Pilot Study of Individual Vessel Limits during July-December 2022, continue improving the assessments and risk analysis for tropical tunas, and continue to work to improve the skipjack tuna stock assessment, especially using recently collected tagging data.

- ii. **Pacific Bluefin Tuna:** Follow the scientific advice and not increase catches.
- iii. **North Pacific Albacore tuna:** Adopt a robust harvest strategy, using the results of the completed Management Strategy Assessment process, and taking into account the list of candidate reference points and candidate harvest control rules.
- iv. **Fish Aggregating devices:** Improve accountability and reduce the ecosystem impacts of FADs through a number of measures detailed below.
- v. **Observer Coverage:** Phase in 100% observer (person or electronic) coverage on all purse seine vessels and longline vessels greater than 20m, starting with a requirement for at least 20% observer coverage in 2023 for all longline vessels and purse seine vessels less than 363m gross tons.
- vi. **Fleet capacity management:** Phase in the plans to achieve optimal fleet capacity by adopting initial measures to reduce overcapacity in 2023.

1. Conservation of Tropical Tunas

In October 2021, through Resolution C-21-04, the IATTC established a 2022-2024 multi-year program of conservation measures for tropical tunas in the eastern Pacific Ocean. The conservation program, with additional management measures, seeks to prevent fishing mortality (F) from exceeding the average fishing mortality during the most recent three-year period (2017-2019)¹. The conservation program includes a 72-day closure for the purse-seine fishery and catch limits on the longline fishery, but also introduced new measures such as individual vessel limits on the catch of bigeye tuna, which are associated with extended closures for vessels exceeding the limits, a reduction in active FAD limits by vessel capacity class, and new provisions on FAD data. Following the provisions of the resolution, the IATTC staff analyzed the effects of its first year of implementation on the stocks. For bigeye and yellowfin, recent stock status indicators were compared with the 2020 risk analysis results, and for skipjack, the 2022 interim stock assessment was used.

For bigeye, stock condition indicators confirmed that the status quo has not been exceeded, and for yellowfin tuna they show that the stock is healthy. Finally, the 2022 skipjack interim assessment estimates the stock to be healthy. Based on these results, the IATTC staff concludes that it does not find scientific support to recommend modifications to the resolution.

With this background, WWF asks the IATTC members to take actions so that the scientific staff, in coordination with the CPCs, adequately implement the Pilot Study of Individual Vessel Limits during July-December 2022, continue improving the assessments and risk analysis for tropical tunas, and continue to work to improve the skipjack tuna stock assessment, especially using recently collected tagging data.

The current work carried out by the IATTC staff to develop the Management Strategy Evaluation for tropical tunas in the eastern Pacific is essential to inform the Members of the Commission about the effectiveness of the reference points and rules of the existing harvest strategy, compared to alternatives, and will help guide the adoption of a permanent rule.

WWF is concerned that the ongoing work plan for evaluating the Management Strategy for tropical tunas, which is planned until the end of 2024, currently only has funding until the end of 2023. WWF asks the Commission to: i) continue effectively supporting this work plan, ensuring economic resources that allow it to successfully complete all the programmed activities, and ii)

¹ Also called status quo conditions.

create a management strategy evaluation working group that allows institutionalizing this process within the IATTC. Many fisheries already certified or in the process of being assessed depend on it.

2. Pacific Bluefin Tuna Conservation

The Pacific Bluefin Tuna Working Group of the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific Ocean (ISC) completed an updated assessment of the species in 2022, concluding that the biomass of the spawning population of 2020 was above the initial recovery target. The assessment includes various catch scenarios, with different catch increases and different catch distributions between large and small fish.

Based on this assessment, the IATTC scientific staff indicates that no changes are necessary in Resolution C-21-05, which already defines total commercial catch limits and biennial catch limits for each CPC. WWF urges the IATTC to follow the scientific advice, that is, to maintain the provisions of the resolution, and not increase catches.

3. North Pacific Albacore Tuna Conservation

The Albacore Working Group of the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific Ocean (ISC) completed the latest stock baseline assessment in 2020. The next one is scheduled for 2023. The Working Group concluded that the North Pacific albacore tuna population is healthy, and that productivity was sufficient to support recent levels of exploitation, assuming both short- and long-term average historical recruitment. In 2021, the Working Group completed the assessment of Management Strategies for the North Pacific albacore stock, in which management and conservation objectives were agreed upon.

WWF supports the adoption of a robust harvest strategy, using the results of the completed Management Strategy Assessment process, and taking into account the list of candidate reference points and candidate harvest control rules that have already been tested by experts of ISC throughout the MSE process, as those choices were not simply suggestions by scientists, but were based on dialogue between scientists, managers, and stakeholders over the past several years.

4. Management of FADS

WWF acknowledges the efforts of the IATTC CPCs to improve the management of the FAD fishery. In addition to these efforts, there is however 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 members to do the following:

- In 2023, provide the IATTC Secretariat with historical raw buoy data received by the original users (i.e., vessels, fishing companies), including both trajectories and biomass acoustic information. It should be the task of the Compliance Committee to ensure that CPCs provide consistent data in a timely manner, which is critical to ensure better stock management.
- In 2023, provide the FAD data for each fishing trip without an observer on board to the IATTC staff as soon as possible after the trip ends.

- Adopt the simplified definition of biodegradable FAD from Zudaire et al., (2021)²
- Incorporate a clear mandate about a gradual process for the transition of fleets towards the exclusive use of biodegradable FADs within the next 3 years.
- Reduce the amount of material used to make the hanging structure of the FAD and the non-biodegradable components of these devices.
- To reduce the risk of marine megafauna becoming entangled in the nets of traditional FADs, when they drift in the sea or when they end up stranded, use materials without mesh for the construction of FADs and thus eliminate possible entanglements.
- Develop and implement science-based FAD set limits that are consistent with management objectives for tropical tunas, and also establish science-based limits to reduce the total number of FADs deployed per vessel.
- Develop FAD collection programs that incorporate incentives to participate.

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

The 5% coverage of observers in the longline fleet is too low for an accurate estimate of catches of rare species. Additionally, the non-coverage of observers in vessels smaller than Class 6 does not allow the improvement of the assessments of tropical tuna stocks, which consequently weakens the capacity of the scientific staff to present better scientific advice to the members of the Commission.

WWF supports the Work Plan for the electronic monitoring system, and the set of recommendations contained in Annex 1 of document SAC-13 INF-D, prepared by the scientific staff of the Commission.

WWF asks the IATTC to phase in 100% observer coverage over the next three years that requires at least 20% observer coverage (human and electronic) by 2023 on purse-seine vessels of less than 363 tonnes carrying capacity that normally do not have observer coverage on board and for all longline vessels of more than 20 m in length. As recommended by the scientific staff, the increase in data collection and reporting will strengthen stock assessments and improve knowledge of the impact of these fishing vessels on IATTC stocks.

6. Fleet Capacity Management

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 WWF urges the IATTC to adopt initial measures at this year's annual meeting. WWF calls attention to two proposals sent in

² "A biodegradable FAD is composed of organic materials and/or ecological alternatives without mesh form, certified by international standards as biodegradable in marine environments".

previous years by the delegations of the European Union and Japan, scientific reports prepared by the Commission and other reports such as those prepared by WWF and IATTC. These proposals provide substantive frameworks to resume deliberations and set initial measures at this year's meeting.

7. Shark Conservation

WWF is concerned by the plight of sharks globally and in the region and asks the IATTC to quickly implement the recommendations of its scientific staff, so that all fleets operating in the Eastern Pacific improve the collection of shark fishery data. This is particularly necessary so that conventional stock assessments and/or other indicators of stock condition can be developed to better inform the management of the various shark species. The Commission should place particular emphasis on improving catch data collection for CITES-listed species, such as hammerheads and silky sharks, as well as other species that are caught by coastal longline and gillnets, as well as by deep-sea longline fisheries and small-scale purse-seine fisheries. It would be highly beneficial for the IATTC to establish a long-term monitoring program for shark fisheries in Central America.

WWF further encourages the IATTC to adopt bycatch mitigation measures and maximize the release of sharks. WWF reminds the IATTC to ensure compliance with the existing shark finning resolution, and also calls on the IATTC to strengthen that finning resolution and to enforce it by requiring all sharks to be landed with their fins naturally attached to the body. In the case of the silky shark, we request that the compliance committee review the level of compliance of the parties in relation to Resolution C-21-06.

WWF also asks the IATTC to require captains to complete the Resolution C-12-07 transshipment declaration forms by species, for all shark catches, and that member countries support sharks and rays tagging programs, in order to determine the degrees of post release survival of these species.

WWF requests that the IATTC, review the compliance of its Resolutions C-11-10 and C-15-04 that established complete prohibitions for the retention on board, landing and commercialization in the Eastern Pacific, of the Oceanic Whitetip Shark (*Charcharhinus longimanus*) and rays of the genus *Modulidae* (*Manta birostris*, *Mobula munkiana*, *Manta thurstoni*). In addition, WWF asks the IATTC to design and adopt a recovery plan for the oceanic whitetip shark by 2023, since this species is globally critically endangered, and by 2026, to do the same for all the rays that have been previously mentioned since they are severely threatened.

A meeting of the joint tuna RFMO by-catch working group was held in Portugal during December 2019. The goal of the meeting was to promote discussions on the assessment and management of elasmobranchs (sharks and rays) from a global perspective within the Tuna Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (T-RFMOs). The joint tuna RFMO by-catch working group meeting agreed a set of recommendations (https://www.iccat.int/Documents/meetings/docs/2019/reports/2019_JWGBY-CATCH_ENG.pdf) and WWF recommends the IATTC consider how it will address these recommendations moving forward.

Finally, WWF recommends that the IATTC prepare non-detriment findings reports (NDFs) for the areas within its jurisdiction for oceanic sharks and rays listed in Appendix II of CITES, when the intention of the contracting parties is to fish and commercialize their products legally and sustainably and agree to protocols to authorize national CITES exports based on these NDFs.

8. Seabird Conservation

WWF recommends revising Resolution C-11-02 so that it is consistent with current knowledge regarding mitigation techniques for seabirds described in document SAC-08-INF-D. The two-column menu system in C-11-02 should be replaced with a requirement to use at least two of the three mitigation methods (weighted lines, night sets, and streamer lines) in combination to satisfy the minimum requirements recommended by ACAP and BirdLife International.

9. Sea Turtle Conservation

On January 1, 2021, a revised resolution on sea turtles (C-19-04) entered into force, requiring the Eastern Pacific tuna fisheries to implement several measures aimed at reducing the bycatch of sea turtles.

Recently, a collaborative research project (BYC-11-01) between the IATTC and the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles, used the EASIFish approach as an alternative means to assess the state of vulnerability and simulate conservation measures and management that can mitigate the risks posed by fishing to the critically endangered eastern Pacific leatherback population. WWF supports the conservation measures proposed in the study, which include the use of circle hooks, fish bait, and best handling and release practices, to reduce leatherback mortality, and calls on member countries of the Commission that operate longline fleets, to adopt them as soon as possible.

10. Collaborative Research on Mahi Mahi

In most of the coastal nations of the eastern Pacific Ocean, from Guatemala in the north to Peru in the south, mahi mahi (*Coryphaena hippurus*), is one of the main resources exploited by artisanal fisheries.

The Antigua Convention establishes that one of the functions of the IATTC is "to adopt appropriate measures to avoid, limit and reduce the effects on associated or dependent species". Mahi mahi is a species that is caught incidentally in the tuna purse-seine and industrial longline fishery in the Eastern Pacific, which prompted some Eastern Pacific coastal States, members of the IATTC, to request the Commission to carry out collaborative research on mahi mahi led by IATTC scientific staff. These investigations, very robust from a scientific point of view, began in 2013, and concluded with an assessment of the mahi mahi population and an assessment of management strategies that were completed in 2016.

Recently, several IATTC coastal states, interested in knowing the current status of the population of mahi mahi in the Eastern Pacific, have proposed that the IATTC staff once again provide scientific and technical assistance to member countries in order to update the work that was held in 2016.

WWF urges the plenary of the Commission to support this request that will allow understanding the dynamics of this important artisanal fishery, and the impact it has on the marine ecosystems of the Eastern Pacific.



Why we are here

To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

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