

COMISIÓN INTERAMERICANA DEL ATÚN TROPICAL
INTER-AMERICAN TROPICAL TUNA COMMISSION

WORKING GROUP ON BYCATCH

3RD MEETING

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**FULL RETENTION REQUIREMENT DURING 2001:
PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS**

The Commission agreed at its meeting in June 2000 to implement a one-year pilot program to require all purse-seine vessels to first retain on board and then land all bigeye, skipjack, and yellowfin tuna caught, except fish considered unfit for human consumption for reasons other than size, in order to provide a disincentive to the capture of these small fish. It was agreed that another exception could be the final set of a trip, when there may be insufficient well space remaining to accommodate all the tuna caught in that set.

The Commission staff was asked to develop appropriate terms of reference for the development and implementation of the pilot program, to include, inter alia, a definition of the exact time during a set at which full retention would then be required, and a definition of fish unfit for human consumption.

The staff reported to governments in November 2000 its proposal that the program be implemented as follows:

1. No bigeye, skipjack, and/or yellowfin tuna ("tuna") caught by purse-seine vessels may be discarded after the point in the set when the net is fully pursed and more than one half of the net has been retrieved. The tuna may be retained beyond the point when more than one half of the net has been retrieved, provided it is subsequently released alive pursuant to a process or mechanism previously agreed by the Director. If equipment malfunctions affect the process of pursing and retrieving the net in such a way that this rule cannot be complied with, the crew must make efforts to release the tuna as soon as possible.
2. The following two exceptions to the above rule shall apply:
 - a. Tuna considered unfit for human consumption for reasons other than size. For each occasion in which tuna that have been caught are discarded for this reason, the following procedures shall apply:
 - i. The captain and chief engineer of the vessel must jointly decide that the tuna is unfit for human consumption for reasons other than size and sign a document to that effect, which shall include an explanation of the basis for their decision.
 - ii. The document shall also contain other relevant information regarding the tuna caught, e.g. how long it was in the net and/or on deck, and the water temperature at the time of capture.
 - iii. Any tuna that is to be discarded by a vessel with an observer on board must, if possible, be retained on deck long enough to allow the observer to record the quantity and sizes of the fish and take samples, if required.
 - b. Tuna caught during the final set of a trip may be discarded if there is insufficient well space remaining to load all the tuna caught in that set.
3. The disposition of the catch of tuna upon unloading, and in particular the quantity, size, and disposition of the tuna in any portion of the catch which is **not** unloaded to a cannery or transshipped, shall be recorded on a form signed by the captain of the vessel; this form shall be provided to the national authority of the state in which the tuna was unloaded, and a copy shall be provided to the Director.
4. Governments will document the disposition of the catch of tuna upon unloading, in particular the portion of catches not unloaded to canneries or transshipped. This information shall be recorded on a form, a copy of which shall be provided to the Director.

The staff of the Commission's field offices shall assist in monitoring the disposition of unloadings to the extent possible. The field offices and governments will be provided with forms for the certification of tuna discarded at sea pursuant to paragraph 2, as well as for the documentation of the disposition of the catch of tuna upon unloading. The forms will be provided to vessels by the pertinent government or field office.

At its 68th meeting in June 2001 the Commission approved a resolution extending the program into 2002.

I. RESULTS

1. Discards at sea

a. Class-6 vessels

The staff has received copies of the discard report forms described in paragraph 2 above for about 400 of the 766 trips by Class-6 vessels in 2001. About 75% of these forms reported fish being discarded because it was unfit for human consumption or too small to land; the remaining 25% attributed discards to the fact that the amount of fish captured in the last set of the trip was greater than the empty capacity of the vessel. The average discard per trip reported on these forms was about 12 metric tons (mt).

An analysis of data from 441 trips covered by IATTC observers indicates that 317 (72%) of trips with catch had tuna discards, for a total of 17,195 mt, or an average of 54 mt per trip, considerably greater than the average from the discard report forms. The reason for this difference is unknown; however, a more comprehensive analysis based on a comparison of data from individual trips will be available at the Commission meeting in June.

b. Smaller vessels

The staff has received copies of the discard report forms for 196 trips by vessels smaller than Class-6 in 2001 from a total of 527 trips by these vessels for which the staff has information. As for Class-6 vessels, about 75% of these forms reported fish being discarded because it was unfit for human consumption; the remaining 25% attributed discards to the fact that the amount of fish captured in the last set of the trip was greater than the empty capacity of the vessel. The average discard per trip reported on these forms was 0.25 mt.

2. Disposition of catch that would not normally be retained on board

The staff has received 32 of the unloading report forms described in paragraph 3 above. Of those, 29 contained information that was not related to the disposition of the catch that would not normally be retained on board, one recorded a quantity of fish being converted to fish meal, and two reported other sales.

3. Reports by Governments

Paragraph 4 above refers to documentation of unloadings by governments. No reports have been received by the staff.

II. ACTION

The 2001 resolution calls for the program to be extended into 2002 and for the Commission to evaluate the results of the program at the end of 2002, to determine whether it should be continued or whether other management measures should be considered. While more complete results will be available later, it seems clear that the reporting envisaged by the 2000 resolution has not been complied with. Unless this situation improves it is hard to see the evaluation concluding anything other than the program did not succeed in its objective of providing an incentive to avoid catches of small fish. The only way to avoid such a conclusion would be for much more effort on the parts of all involved to ensure compliance with the resolution and full reporting.