

INTER-AMERICAN TROPICAL TUNA COMMISSION (IATTC) MEETING, AUGUST 1-5, 2022

The impacts of COVID-19 continue to present challenges to regional fisheries management organizations in conducting meetings. Even under these challenging circumstances, IATTC must ensure the uninterrupted, sustainable management of the tuna stocks and marine ecosystems under its purview. This Statement focuses on those critical measures and issues on which IATTC must take action in 2022, which align with the ISSF global priorities for tuna RFMOs.

Tuna Conservation

What are the issues

Effective management measures — consistent with advice from the IATTC Scientific Advisory Committee — are needed to maintain bigeye, yellowfin and skipjack tuna fishing mortality and biomass at sustainable levels. The IATTC has taken a much-needed step in 2022 with the interim stock assessment of skipjack tuna, which will be improved next year with the inclusion of tagging data. The 2022 interim results indicates that the skipjack stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. In addition, the bias on bigeye catches due to the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on IATTC port-sampling program was corrected. In 2022, the IATTC Scientific Staff, based on bigeye and yellowfin stocks indicators, estimated that the fishing mortality had not exceeded the status quo (i.e., average fishing mortality during the period 2017-2019). Therefore, the IATTC Scientific Staff recommended no changes to the Resolution C-21-04. Resolution C-21-04 includes Individual Vessel Limits (IVL) on bigeye tuna catch, which are associated with extended closure days for purse-seine vessels exceeding the catch limits. Beginning in 2023, IATTC will enhance port-sampling (the IVL Study) to monitor the implementation of IVLs.

Why are we concerned?

In order to maintain bigeye tuna catches at the status quo level, the new measures adopted in C-21-04 must be fully implemented, particularly the IVLs for bigeye. Monitoring an individual vessel's bigeye catch is challenging. The estimation of well and trip level bigeye catch composition using the enhanced port-sampling program will require support from CPCs and shipowners and crew.

What is ISSF asking IATTC to do?

- (1) Ensure all CPCs implement Res. C-21-04 fully so that the fishing mortality for bigeye and yellowfin does not exceed the average fishing mortality during 2017-2019.
- (2) Adequately resource the IVL Pilot Study and encourage CPCs and vessels flying their flags to assist the IATTC Scientific Staff in the implementation of the bigeye IVL Study.
- (3) Finalize the skipjack stock assessment in 2023 that makes use of recently collected tagging data.

Top ISSF Asks for IATTC:

1. Fully implement Res. C-21-04 so that the status quo fishing mortality for bigeye and yellowfin is not exceeded; and adequately resource and implement the bigeye Individual Vessel Limits Pilot Study during 2022.
2. Prohibit the use of any netting in the construction of FADs and encourage fishers/shipowners to deploy a percentage of FADs mostly made of biodegradable materials from 2022 onwards.
3. Accelerate the management strategy evaluation process for all target tunas.
4. Adopt best practice reforms to Res. C-12-07 to improve the regulation of at-sea transshipment.
5. Establish a work plan to strengthen the Review Committee's procedures and outcomes.

FAD Management

What are the issues?

Comprehensive fleet data on FAD deployments and usage until the end of their life span are required, including deactivation date and reasons for the deactivation, to sustainably manage the tropical tuna purse seine fishery. The identification and implementation of FAD marking systems and ownership rules are critical to manage FADs until the end of their lifetime. In order to reduce the impact of FAD structure on the ecosystem, FAD designs should avoid the use of netting and be constructed mainly with biodegradable materials. Data from echo-sounder buoys used to track FADs could help develop effective conservation measures by correctly interpreting key data, such as the relationship between active FADs, object sets and fishing mortality. These data have already been used to obtain indices of tuna abundance to inform skipjack tuna stock assessment. However, historic data are needed to obtain longer temporal data series.

Why are we concerned?

Thousands of FADs with netting panels drift in the eastern Pacific Ocean and some of them end up stranding or sinking far from their fishing grounds. The plastic netting increases the risk of entanglement, has the potential to damage vulnerable ecosystems such as coral reefs, and can persist at sea for hundreds of years. IATTC currently allows netting in FAD construction (C-19-01), has no agreed definition of biodegradable FADs, and does not have an effective FAD marking scheme or FAD recovery mechanisms. Detailed FAD data provision, including raw buoy data that provides biomass and fine-scale location information is required by Resolution C-21-04; however, it does not provide guidelines on the preferred system to report these data, which creates difficulties for data submission. The IATTC staff recommended actions to facilitate the process, such as data being sent directly by echo-sounder buoy manufacturers, which would reduce the risk of transcription errors while increasing efficiency and completeness of data transfer.

What is ISSF asking IATTC to do?

- (1) Amend C-19-01 and/or C-21-04, as appropriate, to:
 - (i) Prohibit the use of netting in any part of FADs as has been done by the IOTC (Res. 19-02) and WCPFC (CMM-2021-01).
 - (ii) Adopt a clear timeframe to transition to fully biodegradable FADs.
 - (iii) Encourage further large-scale biodegradable FAD sea trials and for fishers/shipowners to deploy systematically a percentage of their FADs made of biodegradable materials from 2023 onwards.
 - (iv) Adopt the definitions of “biodegradable” and “non-entangling FAD” recommended by the FAD Working Group.
- (2) Endorse the IATTC Scientific Staff recommendation to facilitate the submission of raw buoy data directly from buoy manufacturers.
- (3) Develop and adopt in 2023:
 - (i) a FAD marking scheme for all new FAD deployments, regardless of vessel type, that requires that FADs be marked on both the buoy and the FAD structure until the end of their lifetime.
 - (ii) clear FAD ownership rules and definitions and a FAD-recovery policy and incentives.
- (4) Request the Scientific Staff to provide science-based limits on active FADs, deployments and/or sets so that the Commission is able to adopt these limits in 2023.
- (5) Task the Review Committee to review non-compliance with FAD data reporting requirements and recommend corrective measures.

Harvest Strategies

What are the issues?

Harvest Strategies (HS) — which include target and limit reference points together with Harvest Control Rules (HCR) — provide pre-agreed rules for managing fisheries resources and acting in response to stock status changes.

Why are we concerned?

IATTC needs to urgently develop species-specific harvest strategies, including harvest control rules. The MSC has established hard deadlines for Principle 1 conditions for certified tuna fisheries. For tuna stocks in the IATTC, if harvest control rules are not adopted by June 2023 for southern albacore and by May 2025 for northern albacore, current MSC certifications for these stocks will be suspended.

What is ISSF asking IATTC to do?

- (1) Through Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) workshops established by C-19-07, enhance the dialogue among fisheries scientists, managers, and other stakeholders to accelerate the management strategy evaluation process for all target tunas.
- (2) As recommended by the Scientific Staff and SAC, ensure continued support for all target tunas MSE, following guidelines from [C-16-02](#) and [C-19-07](#).

Monitoring, Control and Surveillance

OBSERVER COVERAGE AND ELECTRONIC MONITORING

What are the issues?

Comprehensive observer coverage is critical to effective fisheries management, compliance monitoring, and independent verification of catch, effort, species composition and bycatch. 100% observer coverage (human and/or electronic) is feasible and necessary.

Why are we concerned?

The minimum 5% observer coverage requirement for longline vessels is not being fully met. In 2021, the IATTC Staff reported that ~44% of CPCs with qualifying longline vessels have not submitted the required summary reporting on their actual observer coverage. Moreover, even if the minimum 5% coverage level were met, catch estimates of bycatch species are unlikely to be reliable at that coverage and are insufficient for estimating the total catch of bigeye and yellowfin, as reported by the Bycatch Working Group. The lack of sufficient levels of observer coverage in the longline fishery, and the lack of observer coverage on small purse seiners, compromises data collection and the development of effective measures for non-target species and tuna stocks, as well as the monitoring of these fisheries. IATTC also has not yet adopted Electronic Monitoring (EM) standards.

What is ISSF asking IATTC to do?

- (1) Accelerate the development of minimum standards for an electronic monitoring program for purse seine and longline fisheries.
- (2) Establish a fleet-wide observer program (either human or electronic or a combination) for small purse seine vessels in 2023.
- (3) Require 100% observer coverage (human and/or electronic) in industrial purse seine and longline tuna fisheries, including all those engaged in at sea transshipment, in 2024.

TRANSSHIPMENT

What are the issues?

Transshipment at sea presents risks for Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing and other illicit activities if not well-managed and transparent. To better manage transshipment, ensure complete data collection and timely reporting, and to combat IUU fishing activities, deficiencies and loopholes in [Resolution C-12-07](#) must be addressed.

Why are we concerned?

Transshipment at sea can pose a high IUU risk if monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) measures are insufficient. The IATTC transshipment resolution is not consistent with best practices, such as with respect to the time-frames for seeking authorization to transship at sea from the flag State, observer coverage, and deadlines for submitting completed transshipment declarations.

What is ISSF asking IATTC to do?

- (1) Amend Resolution C-12-07 to:
 - (i) Require authorized carrier vessels to be flagged to IATTC CPCs or Cooperating Non-Members.
 - (ii) Require that all reporting is undertaken electronically and in near real-time, but no greater than 24 hours after the event, and all transshipment declarations are submitted to both the flag State and the IATTC Secretariat
 - (iii) Require that all vessels authorized to conduct at-sea transshipment have an IMO number; have operational VMS and AIS systems; and that VMS position data are provided to the IATTC Secretariat in near-real time.
 - (iv) Require information on all at-sea transshipment events (such as notifications, declarations and observer reports) to also be reported to the flag States of both vessels, and intended port States and relevant coastal States.
- (2) Require all vessel captains to complete the transshipment declaration forms under [C-12-07](#) by species, for all shark catches.

Bycatch and Sharks

What are the issues?

IATTC needs to improve measures and strengthen efforts to mitigate the bycatch of vulnerable species in both purse seine and longline fisheries. The management measures in C-19-04 should be implemented comprehensively across the Convention Area. In addition, science-based conservation and management measures to limit fishing mortality on sharks must be adopted and implemented. For all these, data collection and reporting are essential.

Why are we concerned?

For the past several years, the IATTC Scientific Staff, the Bycatch Working Group and SAC have made bycatch-mitigation and bycatch-reporting recommendations for both purse seine and longline fisheries. Unfortunately, the Commission has not acted to adopt these recommendations. Further, proposals by a number of IATTC CPCs to require sharks to be landed with fins naturally attached and to strengthen measures to conserve shark populations continue to be rejected. It is essential that bycatch data collection and reporting from all EPO tuna fisheries, including artisanal fisheries, is improved to implement fully and monitor the effectiveness of IATTC bycatch measures.

What is ISSF asking IATTC to do?

- (1) Adopt the terms of reference establishing a Working Group on Ecosystems and Bycatch.
- (2) Conduct further research on methods of handling and releasing of elasmobranchs (sharks, Mobula-rays) from purse-seine vessels, with special focus on large individuals, and fund electronic tagging experiments to evaluate post-release survival rates.
- (3) Amend C-11-02 to update seabird mitigation options (e.g. hook shielding devices), including harmonization with WCPFC CMM 2018-03 and the ACAP guidelines.
- (4) Ensure full compliance with C-11-10 and C-15-04 and amend Resolution C-05-03 to require that all sharks be landed with fins naturally attached without exceptions.
- (5) Develop and adopt a recovery plan for oceanic white-tip sharks by 2023.

Compliance

What are the issues?

IATTC has a transparent compliance process but it can be strengthened. IATTC has not yet fully implemented the requirements of Resolution C-11-07 on the Process for Improved Compliance of Resolutions Adopted by the Commission, which was adopted in 2011. In June 2022, IATTC held a Workshop to discuss how to strengthen the procedures and outcomes of the Committee for the Review of Implementation of Measures Adopted by the Commission to ensure improved compliance and implementation.

Why are we concerned?

IATTC does not report on individual CPC compliance or their actions, and the IATTC has no scheme of responses to non-compliance.

What is ISSF asking IATTC to do?

Establish a work plan to strengthen the Committee's procedures and outcomes and operationalize paragraphs 5-8 of C-11-07, including improving follow-up procedures and developing a hierarchy of infractions.

Capacity Management

What are the issues?

Although IATTC is the only tuna RFMO with a closed vessel registry, its current capacity is well in excess of resource productivity.

Why are we concerned?

Operative purse seine capacity is estimated to be continuing to increase since 2015 due to latent capacity being activated.

What is ISSF asking IATTC to do?

Implement the 2014 Technical Experts Workshop on the Capacity of the Tuna-fishing Fleet in the EPO recommendations to strengthen the 2005 Plan for the Regional Management of Fishing Capacity and reduce the current capacity.

ISSF Global Priorities for Tuna RFMOs

Implementation of rigorous management procedures, including harvest control rules and reference points

Effective management of fleet capacity, including developing mechanisms that support developing coastal state engagement in the fishery

Science-based FAD management & fully non-entangling without netting and biodegradable FAD designs

Increased member compliance with all measures adopted, and greater transparency of processes reviewing member compliance with measures

Strengthened Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS) measures and increased observer coverage, including through modern technologies such as electronic monitoring and e-reporting

Adoption of best-practice bycatch mitigation and shark conservation and management measures, including requiring all sharks be landed with fins naturally attached

Did you know?

ISSF is leading research on biodegradable FADs in collaboration with fleets operating in the EPO, coastal nations, and other stakeholders.

ISSF develops resources for the vessel community, including skippers guidebooks on bycatch-mitigation techniques and as well as reports on electronic monitoring and vessel monitoring systems.

ISSF also offers guidelines for implementing non-entangling and biodegradable FADs.

Five ISSF conservation measures focus on shark and bycatch mitigation.

Two ISSF conservation measures focus on FAD management.

