

INTER-AMERICAN TROPICAL TUNA COMMISSION
104th MEETING OF THE IATTC
Lisbon, Portugal
31 August – 4 September 2026

PROPOSAL IATTC-104 B-2 REV

SUBMITTED BY ECU, USA and EU

INFORMATION EXCHANGE AND ESTABLISHMENT OF PROVISIONAL REFERENCE POINTS
FOR SWORDFISH IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC ~~IN~~OF THE IATTC AREA

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

BACKGROUND AND INFORMATION NEEDS

- Swordfish (*Xiphias gladius*) is a highly migratory species of economic, social and ecological importance. Its management in the eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO) remains constrained by the uneven availability of data, insufficient regional exchange of information, and the absence of formally adopted reference points.
- The IATTC Strategic Science Plan for 2026–2030 includes swordfish under the “Sustainable fisheries” theme and provides for a benchmark stock assessment by 2028 (IATTC-103-03a).
- The information required includes, inter alia, catch and effort, fleet characteristics, observation and monitoring, bycatch and protected species, biological sampling, transshipments, data quality and compliance.
- The coverage and level of detail of these data vary among the Members and Cooperating non-Members (CPCs); it is therefore necessary to harmonize collaboration mechanisms and to strengthen a regional information base for stock assessments.

PROVISIONAL REFERENCE POINTS

- In view of the stock assessment scheduled for 2028 and the potential uncertainty in estimating biological reference points based on maximum sustainable yield (MSY) with sufficient robustness, it is proposed to adopt, on a precautionary and transitional basis, provisional biomass-based reference points to guide management decisions until more robust scientific information becomes available.
- As initial precautionary thresholds, it is proposed to establish a target reference point (TRP) equivalent to 35% of the unfished spawning biomass (SSB_0) and a limit reference point (LRP) equivalent to 20% of the unfished spawning biomass.
- These reference points shall be provisional and interim in nature and shall be reviewed once the results of the stock assessment scheduled for 2028 become available, taking into account the advice of the Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) and improvements in the quality and coverage of scientific and fishery information at the regional level.

PROPOSAL C-XX-XX

INFORMATION EXCHANGE AND ESTABLISHMENT OF PROVISIONAL REFERENCE POINTS FOR SWORDFISH IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC OF THE IATTC AREA~~IN THE IATTC AREA~~

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

Taking into account that the objective of the Antigua Convention is to ensure the long-term conservation and sustainable use of the fish stocks in the eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO);

Recalling Article VII of the Antigua Convention, which directs the Commission to adopt conservation and management measures based on the best scientific evidence available;

Mindful of its responsibility to make recommendations to its Members and Cooperating non-Members (CPCs) for the long-term sustainable use of the stocks of tunas and tuna-like species;

Recognizing that swordfish (*Xiphias gladius*) is a highly migratory species and a priority for the management of the Commission, and that the quality, coverage and availability of fishery information vary among CPCs;

Recognizing that a new fishing gear consisting of a trap line (sometimes referred to as ‘ring gear’) has begun to be deployed by vessels in the area managed by the IATTC;

Noting that Resolution C-19-08 establishes provisions on scientific observers for longline vessels, and that the Strategic Science Plan 2026–2030 identifies data collection, sustainable fisheries, knowledge transfer and capacity building among its core themes;

~~Noting that the Strategic Science Plan provides for a benchmark assessment of swordfish by 2028, the quality of which will depend on harmonized catch, effort, biological, observer and bycatch data;~~ **Taking into consideration** that the Strategic Science Plan, under goal FISH 6, objective 4 (SAC-16-07), establishes that an assessment of South Pacific swordfish will be carried out between 2026 and 2030, the quality of which will depend on harmonized catch, effort, biological, observer and bycatch data;

Further recognizing that the observer programs of the Government of Ecuador, including private fishery improvement project initiatives ~~such as SWORDFISH-EC~~, have strengthened information on catch, effort, CPUE, biological sampling and bycatch since 2022, and can contribute to regional assessment processes;

Considering that the absence of reference points limits the ability to determine stock status, adopt timely measures and develop harvest control rules;

Considering the obligation of the Commission, under Article VII.1(c) of the Convention, to adopt measures to maintain or restore the populations of harvested species at levels of abundance that can produce the maximum sustainable yield (MSY);

Bearing in mind that, on the basis of the best scientific information available and of the precautionary approach, the IATTC has adopted, in Resolution C-23-06, harvest control rules for the tropical tunas (yellowfin, bigeye and skipjack) based on reference points underpinned by the maximum sustainable yield (MSY);

Convinced that strengthening data exchange and the precautionary adoption of provisional reference points are complementary measures to improve the assessment and management of swordfish in the EPO;

Agrees:

INFORMATION EXCHANGE AND HARMONIZATION

1. Implement, during the second half of 2027, a second regional technical workshop on South Pacific swordfish within the IATTC Area, funded by the private sector of Ecuador, the objectives of which ~~no later than the first quarter of 2027 in order to~~ shall be:
 - The timely, efficient and secure exchange of scientific and fishery information among the CPCs, with the support of the IATTC scientific staff, in accordance with the applicable confidentiality and data-use rules.

- To review and analyse the scope and effects of the deployment of trap lines known as ‘ring gear’ on the fishery and on the stocks, including a description of their structure and of the rules governing their use by the vessels operating in the IATTC Area.
 - To identify, categorize and prioritize the problems and the solutions related to data collection, including data collected from trap lines.
2. Request that the CPCs strengthen and, where feasible, harmonize the collection and reporting of: a) catch and effort; b) vessel and gear characteristics; c) at-sea observer data and landings monitoring; d) bycatch and discards; e) biological measurements; and f) transshipments.
 3. Instruct the IATTC scientific staff, in consultation with the Scientific Advisory Committee and the CPCs, to identify information gaps in order to propose minimum standards and validation mechanisms, and to report on progress before the benchmark assessment scheduled for 2028.
 4. ~~Establish a Working Group on the Longline Swordfish Fishery, with the objective of strengthening technical cooperation, capacity building and the exchange of information and experiences among national programs, fishery improvement projects and other relevant initiatives, promoting the harmonization and improvement of at sea and landings data collection systems, so as to generate more complete and standardized scientific information to support the assessment and management work carried out by the IATTC scientific staff.~~

PROVISIONAL REFERENCE POINTS

5. Provisionally adopt, consistent with the interim reference point protocol and with the values recommended by the IATTC scientific staff in document SAC-14-INF-O, the following spawning-biomass-based proxy reference points for the South Pacific swordfish stock in the IATTC Area. ~~Provisionally adopt, for the swordfish stock in the IATTC Area, the following spawning-biomass-based proxy reference points:~~
 - a) Target Reference Point: ~~35~~55% of the spawning biomass that would exist in the absence of fishing activity (~~0.35~~ SSB₀).
 - b) Limit Reference Point: ~~20~~20% of the spawning biomass that would exist in the absence of fishing activity (~~0.20~~ SSB₀).
6. Recognize that these reference points are interim precautionary measures and do not prejudice the selection of definitive or optimal reference points.
7. Use the provisional reference points to support the interpretation of stock status and the future development of management options and harvest control rules through management strategy evaluation, taking into account scientific uncertainty.
8. Review these reference points after the benchmark assessment scheduled for 2028, or earlier if substantial new scientific information so warrants, taking into account the advice of the Scientific Advisory Committee and of the IATTC scientific staff. The MSY-based target and limit reference points shall also be evaluated and compared with the depletion-based reference points adopted in this Resolution.
9. Ensure that subsequent assessments are carried out at an appropriate frequency, preferably every three to five years, subject to available resources and to the priorities of the Strategic Science Plan.