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POSITION

STATEMENT

2024



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Oceans Practice

WWF POSITION STATEMENT FOR THE 102ND MEETING OF THE INTER-AMERICAN TROPICAL TUNA COMMISSION

September 2 – September 6, 2024

The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) thanks the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) for the opportunity to attend the 102nd ordinary session as an observer.

WWF encourages IATTC member countries to accelerate progress on measures to recover marine species in the region and maintain and expand their commitment to responsible management. These are necessary conditions for achieving sustainable fishing. This is crucial, since tuna in the Eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO) 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 102nd Annual Meeting of the IATTC are summarized as follows:

1. **Tropical tunas:** a) maintain the current management measures of resolution C-21-04 for three more years and annually amend the measure, if necessary, based on the stock status indicators of the three species of tropical tuna. b) maintain the limit per individual vessel for bigeye tuna and continue the Reinforced Monitoring Program that allows close monitoring of the measure.
 - 1.1 **Management strategies evaluation:** a) complete the management strategy evaluation for bigeye tuna, and b) create a management strategy evaluation working group that will allow this process to be institutionalized within the IATTC.
2. **Pacific bluefin tuna:** complete the management strategy evaluation in progress and do not increase catch quotas without reconfirmation that each member country will adopt the management strategy evaluation in 2025.
3. **Fish aggregation devices:** adopt a FAD marking scheme and require activation of operational buoys, as defined by the joint tuna RFMO FAD 2019 meeting, occur exclusively onboard prior to deployment and develop clear rules for deactivation of FAD buoys at sea.
4. **Observer coverage:** WWF recommends the IATTC to phase in 100% observer coverage over the next three years that requires at least 20% observer coverage (human and electronic) by 2025 on purse-seine vessels of less than 363 tones carrying capacity that normally do not have observer coverage on board and for all longline vessels of more than 20 m in length.
5. **Electronic monitoring:** Adopt interim minimum standards for an EPO Electronic Monitoring System.
6. **Shark conservation:** Strengthen finning resolution by requiring that all sharks be landed with fins naturally attached to the body; improving catch data collection for CITES-listed species, such as hammerheads and silky sharks. 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.

1. Conservation of tropical tunas

In 2024, the IATTC staff assessed the condition of the populations based on various sources of scientific information. For bigeye and skipjack, baseline assessments were used to assess the status of the stocks.

The baseline assessment of the skipjack tuna stock prepared by IATTC scientists shows that the stock is in very good condition, i.e., current fishing mortality is below the MSY level and spawning biomass is above the dynamic level corresponding to the MSY.

The 2024 baseline assessment for bigeye tuna in the EPO continues to use a risk analysis approach to provide management advice. This analysis estimates a very low probability that the limit reference points have been exceeded and remains below the FMSY.

It was not possible to complete the stock assessment for yellowfin tuna as uncertainty remains in the spatial structure/population structure and therefore scientists consider additional research necessary to complete a baseline assessment for yellowfin in the EPO.

IATTC scientists note that the accuracy of the longline abundance index has deteriorated rapidly since 2020, due to the sharp decline in the spatial coverage and fishing effort (number of hooks) of the longline fleet in the EPO. For that reason, to improve stock assessments of yellowfin and bigeye

tunas, they are recommending collecting and integrating detailed operational data from longline fisheries operating in the EPO.

IATTC scientific staff recommended several research activities to be carried out in collaboration with CPCs and relevant stakeholders, which would need to be completed to have the best scientific information to support the design of a new multi annual conservation measure.

The staff and the Scientific Advisory Committee agree in recommending the extension of resolution C-21-04 for up to three years. If the measure extends for three years, after an annual review of the population status indicators, if necessary, the Commission should amend it. **The scientific staff estimates that the Reinforced Monitoring Program has been very useful in estimating bigeye tuna catches per trip and per vessel, and for that reason recommends its continuation.**

With this background, WWF requests the following from the IATTC members:

- Maintain the current management measures of Resolution C-21-04 for three more years and annually amend the measure, if necessary, based on the stock status indicators of the three tropical tuna species.
- Maintain the limit per individual vessel of bigeye tuna and continue the Reinforced Monitoring Program that allows for close monitoring of the measure.
- Make arrangements to make operational data for each longline set routinely available for scientific purposes.

1.1 Management Strategies Evaluation

The current work carried out by the IATTC staff to develop the Management strategy evaluation for tropical tunas in the Eastern Pacific is essential. This body of work informs the members of the Commission on the effectiveness of the reference points and the existing harvest control rules, compared to alternatives, and will help guide the adoption of a permanent rule.

WWF is concerned that the ongoing management strategy evaluation work plan, with an initial focus on bigeye tuna and moving on to other tropical tunas towards the end of the current plan in 2024, is progressing too slowly. Now that there is a complete assessment of the bigeye tuna and with guaranteed time from a staff expert, the Management strategy evaluation for this species should be concluded and the others should move forward according to the schedule.

Many fisheries already certified or in the process of assessment depend on it. WWF asks the Commission to:

- Complete the Management strategy evaluation of the bigeye tuna.
- That the Commission agree and adopt the management objectives (SAC-15-07), SAC-15-08) and revised reference points for tropical tunas (SAC-15-05).
- That the Commission, following the recommendations of the SAC, considers establishing a Science-Management Dialogue Working Group that allows this process to be institutionalized within the IATTC.

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 a baseline assessment of the species in 2024 (SAC-15 INF-N). The population reached the second recovery target of 20%SSBF=0 in 2021, 13 years earlier than initially planned. The Working Group is also carrying out a management strategy evaluation scheduled for completion in 2025.

Although Pacific bluefin tuna's stock recovered to rebuilding target, WWF maintains deep concerns regarding the health of the Pacific bluefin tuna stock and remains committed to restoring and rebuilding this ecologically, sociologically, and economically important fishery resource. **Therefore, WWF recommends the IATTC to take a precautionary approach for maintaining this stock and:**

- Continue the Management strategy evaluation work and establish a precautionary Limit and Target Reference Point for Pacific bluefin tuna by 2025;
- Without reconfirmation that each member country will adopt the management strategy evaluation in 2025, there should be no increase in catch quotas; any increase from the current level of catches, must be underpinned by scientific advice, ensuring that the increasing trend of the stock abundance is preserved.
- Developing Catch Documentation Scheme (CDS) for thorough monitoring of Pacific bluefin tuna to ensure proper stock assessment and reduce IUU fishing risk by 2025.

3. FAD Management

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 FADs that incorporates monitoring, management, and control components. In this context, **WWF urges IATTC members to do the following:**

- Develop and adopt a FAD marking scheme, which requires marking the buoy and FAD structure.
- Adopt clearer rules on FAD ownership.
- Require activation of operational buoys, as defined by the joint tuna RFMO FAD 2019 meeting, occur exclusively onboard prior to deployment and develop clear rules for deactivation of FAD buoys at sea.
- Develop and adopt a completely transparent FAD recovery policy.
- Develop and implement science-based FAD set limits that are consistent with management objectives for tropical tunas, and establish science-based limits to reduce the total number of FADs deployed per vessel.

4. Observer coverage for longline vessels over 30 meters 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 such as sharks and sea turtles. Additionally, the non-coverage of observers in purse

seine 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 recommends the IATTC to phase in 100% observer coverage over the next three years that requires at least 20% observer coverage (human and electronic) by 2025 on purse-seine vessels of less than 363 tones 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.

5. Electronic monitoring

WWF supports the Work Plan for the electronic monitoring system, and the set of recommendations contained in document SAC-14 INF-H, prepared by the scientific staff of the Commission.

WWF asks the IATTC to adopt provisional minimum standards for an EPO Electronic Monitoring System, based on the draft prepared by the Working Group, and taking into consideration the recommendations of the IATTC staff and the results of the six workshops on Electronic Monitoring (SAC-15 INF-Q).

6. Shark conservation

WWF is concerned by the conservation status of sharks - both 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, coastal gillnets, 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 additionally encourages the IATTC to adopt the shark handling and release best practice guidelines outlined in document SAC-15-11 and also the provisional list of shark species under IATTC jurisdiction, which includes the 19 oceanodromous and epipelagic species caught in the main industrial and artisanal pelagic fisheries in the EPO (list C of document SAC-15-09).

WWF reminds the IATTC to ensure compliance with the existing shark finning resolution and calls on the IATTC to strengthen the finning resolution and to enforce it by requiring all sharks to be landed with their fins naturally attached to the body.

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.

7. Seabirds conservation

WWF recommends reviewing Resolution C-11-02 so that it is consistent with current knowledge regarding seabird mitigation techniques described in document SAC-08-INF-D. The two-column menu system in C-11-02 should be replaced with the requirement to use the three mitigation methods (weighted lines, night sets, and bird-scaring lines) in combination in such a way that they satisfy the requirements recommended by ACAP and BirdLife International.

WWF also recommends adopting the interim best practice handling and release guidelines available in Annex 1 of document EB-02-03 adopted by ACAP, NOAA Fisheries, and Fisheries New Zealand.

8. Sea turtle conservation

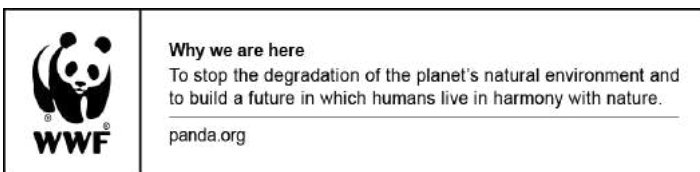
A revised resolution on sea turtles (C-19-04) came into force on January 1, 2021, requiring tuna fisheries in the Eastern Pacific to implement several measures aimed at reducing sea turtle bycatch, particularly use of circle hooks and fish bait in shallow longline sets.

Recently, an expansion of a collaborative research project (BYC-11-02) between the IATTC and the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles employed an improved EASIFish model approach as an alternative means of assessing vulnerability status and simulate conservation and management measures that can mitigate the risks imposed by fishing on the critically endangered eastern Pacific leatherback turtle 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.**

For more information

Pablo Guerrero | Marine Conservation Director |
WWF-Ecuador
Tel: +593 99 920 4171 | pablo.guerrero@wwf.org.ec

Alessandro Buzzi | Interim Global Tuna Lead |
WWF Mediterranean Marine Initiative
Tel: +39 346 2357481 | abuzzi@wwfmedpo.org



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