



POSITION
2026



Copyright Credit © AdobeStock

WWF's position statement for the 104th Meeting of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission

AUGUST 31 – SEPTEMBER 4, 2026

The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) thanks the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) for the opportunity to attend the 104th regular session as an observer.

WWF sees this meeting as an opportunity for the IATTC member countries to make rapid progress on measures that support the recovery of marine wildlife in the region, and to maintain and expand their commitment to responsible management, which is necessary to achieve sustainable fishing. WWF believes this is important because the tuna resources of the Eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO) support a fishing industry that provides livelihoods for tens of thousands of people and contributes to economic growth and social development in the region. A summary of key issues to address and WWF's recommendations for the 104th Annual CIAT Meeting are as follows:

- i. **Tropical tunas:** a) Adopt, for the 2027-2028 period, a management procedure, as recommended by IATTC scientific staff in SAC – 17 - 06 , in which any reduction of the fishing ban is applied gradually; b) Maintain the individual vessel limit for bigeye tuna and continue implementing the Port-based Integrated Sampling Program as a platform for collecting scientific data to support the management of the tropical tuna fishery in the EPO; c) Continue developing and applying management procedures for tropical tuna stocks in the EPO, including further refinement of management objectives, performance indicators, the harvest control rule, and monitoring strategies.
- ii. **Pacific Bluefin Tuna:** a) Adopt a management procedure with precautionary limit and target reference points for Pacific Bluefin Tuna in 2026, based on the results of the intersessional meeting of the Joint Working Group held in March 2026; b) No increases in catch quotas should be granted unless the MP is adopted and any increase from the current catch levels must be supported by scientific advice, ensuring that the upward trend in population abundance is maintained.
- iii. **Fish aggregation devices FADs:** a) Improve the notification of remote deactivation and reactivation, including developing an updated notification template or requiring automatic notification from buoy manufacturers; b) Continue Pacific-wide collaboration to reduce FAD losses and strengthen recovery programs, including coordination with the WCPFC-SPC.

- iv. **Coverage of observers and electronic monitoring:** In the next three years, achieve 100% observer coverage (human or electronic) on all purse seiners and longliners over 20 m, starting with the requirement of at least 20% observer coverage in 2027 for all 20 m longliners and purse seiners under 363 tons.
- v. **Shark conservation:** Strengthen the finning ban by requiring that all sharks be landed with their fins naturally attached to the body; improve data collection on the catch of CITES-listed species, such as hammerhead and silky sharks. WWF recommends that IATTC adopt the best practice guidelines for handling and releasing sharks proposed by scientific staff in 2026.
- vi. **Fleet capacity:** Develop and adopt a plan to reduce and eventually eliminate overcapacity in the purse-seine fleet operating in the area of the IATTC Convention.



1. Conservation of tropical tunas

The updated 2026 assessment for bigeye tuna shows a significant improvement in the population status, largely attributed to reduced juvenile fishing mortality thanks to the implementation of the individual vessel threshold (IVT) measure to cut bigeye catches in sets on floating objects during 2022-2025.

The corresponding risk analyses showed that the three tropical tuna populations are in good condition. In 2026, the IATTC Scientific Staff completed a Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) for bigeye tuna and concluded that the scientific conditions specified in Resolution C-25-01 had been met and that the conservation measures established for 2026 could remain in effect during 2027 and 2028.

In addition, the MSE evaluated eight candidate harvest control rules (HCRs) and identified the three that best fit the management objectives discussed during the IATTC MSE workshop. A preliminary MSE carried out by the staff concluded that applying any of these three HCRs would not negatively affect the status of yellowfin or skipjack tuna populations.

Detailed data is needed, both historical and current, on catches and fishing effort, broken down by sets and by vessel, from longline fisheries, to create reliable abundance indices and strengthen scientific advice.

Resolution C-25-01 set out two paths for scientific advice in 2026: 1) extending the 2026 measures through 2027-2028 if the MSE process confirmed their effectiveness; and 2) updated recommendations based on a new assessment of the bigeye tuna population and the MSE process.

With this background, and given the current state of overcapacity of purse seine vessels in the Eastern Pacific, WWF asks the members of IATTC the following:

- i. Adopt, for the 2027-2028 period, a management procedure, as recommended by the IATTC scientific staff in SAC – 17 - 06, in which any reduction of the fishing ban is applied gradually.
- ii. Keep the bigeye tuna limit per individual vessel and continue implementing the Port Integrated Sampling Program (PISP) as a platform for collecting scientific data to support the management of the tropical tuna fishery in the EPO.
- iii. Continue with the development and implementation of management procedures (harvest strategies) for tropical tuna populations in the EPO, including further refinement of management objectives, performance indicators, the harvest control rule, and monitoring strategies.
- iv. Adopt measures so that the operational data from each longline set are routinely available for scientific purposes.



2. Pacific bluefin tuna conservation

The Pacific Bluefin Tuna Working Group (PBFWG) of the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific Ocean (ISC) completed a benchmark assessment of the Pacific bluefin tuna (PBF) population in 2024 (SAC-15 INF-N). The population reached the second recovery target of 20% of spawning biomass (SSB) ($F=0$) in 2021, 13 years earlier than initially expected, and the spawning biomass has continued to increase since then. The next benchmark assessment is scheduled for 2027, with a peer review in 2026.

Although the Pacific Bluefin Tuna population has recovered to reach the recovery target, the absence of strong management measures to address the impact of IUU fishing is of serious concern to WWF. Such measures are necessary to ensure the health of this fishery that includes the continual recovery of Pacific bluefin, important for both ecological and socio-economic wellbeing. Therefore, WWF recommends that IATTC take a precautionary approach to maintain this population and:

- i. Adopt a management procedure for Pacific bluefin tuna with precautionary limit and target reference points in 2026 based on the result of JWG Intersessional Meeting in March 2026;
- ii. Without a management procedure in place, no increases in quotas should be allowed and any increases from the 2025 catch levels must be backed by scientific advice, making sure that the population's upward trend is preserved.
- iii. Develop detailed measures and work plans for monitoring, control, and surveillance (MCS) of Pacific bluefin tuna. In particular, establish standardized reporting procedures for bycatch and discards, and strengthen reporting and monitoring of caging at farms; ➤
- iv. Approve a catch documentation system for thorough tracking of Pacific Bluefin Tuna in order to ensure a proper assessment of the population and reduce the risk of IUU fishing to be implemented in 2026.
- v. Improve transparency in Pacific Bluefin Tuna fisheries by gradually implementing a 100% observer presence (human or electronic) on all industrial vessels that fish or catch Pacific Bluefin Tuna. Both the IATTC and the WCPFC have adopted minimum standards for electronic monitoring systems, which provide a good alternative to human observers.

3. FADs Management

WWF recognizes the efforts of the IATTC Cooperating Parties to improve the management of FAD fisheries. In addition to these efforts, however, there is an urgent need to adopt a comprehensive management strategy for these devices that incorporate monitoring, management, and control components. It is particularly concerning that a recent study carried out by IATTC staff (FAD-09-02) found that only 30% of the FADs are observed being recovered or interacted with, which means that up to 70% of the FADs observed during the study period (2019-2024) may not have been recovered. This analysis was expanded in 2026 to also include raw buoy data (FAD-10-02), confirming that a considerable number of buoys regularly leave active fishing areas, and some of them end up stranded in the EPO and beyond. In this context, WWF urges the cooperating parties of IATTC to do the following:

- i. Develop and adopt a scheme for marking FADs, which requires marking the buoy and the structure of the FAD.

- ii. Adopt clearer rules about the ownership of the FAD.
- iii. Improve the notification of remote deactivation and reactivation, including developing an updated notification template or requiring automatic notification from buoy manufacturers.
- iv. Continue collaborating on a Pacific-wide scale to reduce the loss of FADs and strengthen recovery programs, including coordinating with the WCPFC-SPC and other regional databases (for example, French Polynesia, Clipperton, and the Galápagos).
- v. Develop and implement limits on FAD sets based on science, consistent with management objectives for tropical tunas, and also set science-based limits to reduce the total number of FADs deployed per vessel.

4. Coverage of Observers and electronic monitoring for longline vessels over 20 meters in length and small purse seine vessels

The 5% coverage of observers on the longline fishing fleet is too low for an accurate estimate of catches of uncommon species. Despite significant progress by TUNACONS' voluntary program, the lack of observers on purse seine vessels smaller than Class 6 prevents improvements in assessments of tropical tuna stocks, which in turn weakens the scientific staff's ability to provide better scientific advice to its Commission members. In 2024, through resolution C-24-09, the IATTC adopted voluntary provisional minimum standards for the use of electronic monitoring systems in EPO fisheries that offers an alternative and steps should be taken by the EM working group on the terms and conditions for EM data to be made available to the Commission. The increase in data collection and reporting will help strengthen stock assessments and improve understanding of the impact these fishing vessels have on IATTC stocks. Also, major buyers in key markets have consistently requested that RFMOs phase in 100% observer coverage on all industrial tuna vessels.

WWF asks the IATTC to gradually increase observer coverage over the next three years until it reaches 100%. By 2027, the Commission should require at least 20% coverage of scientific and independent observers (both human and electronic) on purse seine vessels under 363 tons carrying capacity, which normally don't have observers on board. For longline vessels over 20 meters in length, WWF requests that by 2027, on-board observer coverage be increased by at least 20%, as recommended by the IATTC scientific staff.

5. Address fleet overcapacity

Fleet overcapacity is the biggest threat to tropical tuna populations and vulnerable bycatch species in the EPO. WWF has continued to emphasize that the current fleet capacity operating in the region is almost double the target level set by the IATTC. Increasing operations of authorized vessels, using more efficient FADs, and/or replacing older vessels with more efficient ones will further intensify this fishing pressure. Clearly, there is an urgent need to reduce overcapacity to ensure the health of tropical tuna populations and secure the future of the industry that depends on these fisheries.

To address these issues, WWF has repeatedly requested that the member states of IATTC finalize a management plan to eliminate overcapacity in the convention area, and WWF urges IATTC to take initial measures at this year's annual meeting. WWF draws attention to two proposals submitted in previous years by the European Union and Japan delegations, 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 establish initial measures at this year's meeting. Therefore, we recommend that IATTC develop and adopt a plan to reduce and eventually eliminate overcapacity in the purse seine fleet operating in the Convention area.



6. Conservation of Sharks

WWF is concerned about the difficult situation of sharks worldwide 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 various shark species. The Commission should place special emphasis on improving the collection of catch data for species listed in CITES, such as hammerhead sharks and silky sharks.

WWF additionally encourages the IATTC to adopt the best practice guidelines for handling and releasing sharks proposed by the scientific staff in 2026.

WWF reminds IATTC to ensure that the existing shark finning resolution is followed and also asks IATTC to strengthen that finning resolution and reinforce it by requiring that all sharks be landed with their fins naturally attached to the body.

Finally, WWF recommends that IATTC support the shark research plan proposed by the staff, described in document SAC 17 09, to promote the conservation and management of sharks in the EPO.



7. Conservation of Seabirds

WWF recommends reviewing resolution C-11-02 to ensure it is consistent with current knowledge regarding mitigation techniques for seabirds. The two-column menu system in C-11-02 should be replaced with the requirement to use at least two of the three mitigation methods (weighted lines, night setting, and bird-scaring lines) in combination, in a way that meets the minimum recommended requirements by ACAP and BirdLife International.



8. Conservation of sea turtles

On January 1, 2021, a revised resolution on sea turtles (C-19-04) came into effect, requiring Eastern Pacific tuna fisheries to implement various measures aimed at reducing the incidental catch of sea turtles, particularly the use of circle hooks and fish bait in shallow longline sets.

Recently, the expansion of a collaborative research project between IATTC and the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles used an improved approach of the EASIFish model as an alternative way to assess vulnerability and simulate conservation and management measures that could reduce the risks posed by fishing on the critically endangered Eastern Pacific leatherback turtle population. WWF supports the conservation measures proposed in this study, which include using circle hooks, fish bait, and better handling and release practices to reduce leatherback turtle mortality and urges the member countries of the Commission that operate longline fleets to adopt them as soon as possible.

9. Human and Labor Rights in Tuna Fishing

The International Labor Organization (ILO) has long recognized that fishing is one of the most dangerous professions in the world. WWF welcomes international recognition by the ILO and other institutions of the hazardous nature of these crucial jobs at sea. However, in recent years, violations of the well-being of fishing crews have been reported to authorities and NGOs. WWF is concerned about this trend, takes these reports very seriously, and calls on IATTC to act immediately and adopt a binding resolution on the welfare and safety of crews on tuna vessels operating in the EPO.



10. Accelerate the adoption of spatio-temporal measures, including the identification of high-risk areas (biodiversity hot spots) to ensure biodiversity protection

WWF calls on IATTC Parties to actively support and operationalize the BBNJ Agreement, its objectives within the Commission's mandate. This includes strengthening cooperation on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction. Effective implementation will be essential to enhance ocean governance and safeguard highly migratory species and their ecosystems.

In this framework, WWF calls on the Commission, to mandate the Scientific Advisory Committee to identify high-risk areas and periods where targeted, evidence-based spatial or temporal measures, including conditional or dynamic interventions are demonstrably effective for biodiversity protection and do not result in effort displacement. This would be a first step to operationalize area-based management tool that are coherent with the BBNJ provisions.



Working to sustain the natural world for the benefit of people and wildlife.

together possible™

panda.org

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Alessandro Buzzi

Global Tuna Leader | WWF

Phone: +39 346 2357481 |
abuzzi@wwfmedpo.org

Pablo Guerrero

Marine Conservation Director | WWF-Ecuador

Phone: +593 99 920 4171 |
pablo.guerrero@wwf.org.ec