



FECOP

(Costa Rican Sport Fishing Federation)

Statement to the 103rd Meeting of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission

September 1-5, 2025. Panama City, Panama

FECOP appreciates the opportunity to participate as an observer in the 103rd Meeting of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) and wishes to all member delegations of this Regional Fisheries Management Organization every success. We respectfully request the delegations to consider the following recommendations during their deliberations:

A Conservative and Precautionary Approach to the Adoption of Conservation Measures

This year, the information provided by the IATTC scientific team is positive regarding the status of tuna stocks, which we welcome. However, this outlook may lead this Commission to consider relaxing current conservation measures, as shown by some of the delegations' proposals. We urge the Commission to carefully consider whether these decisions could have a negative impact in the medium and long term. We call for a conservative and precautionary approach, avoiding changes to measures that have proven to be yielding positive results. Instead, we suggest that they be maintained for at least one more year and that gradual measures be taken later if robust conditions exist for such decisions in the future.

Do not increase existing fishing capacity

The IATTC has not yet adopted a plan for the management of fishing capacity, and new capacity requests are received year after year. This plan has been delayed for more than two decades, creating a complex scenario for discussing and making decisions regarding capacity increases or how to reduce excess capacity, especially in an ocean that is changing because of global warming. For this reason, it is recommended that a reasonable time limit be established for the submission of a Capacity Management Plan to the Commission for consideration, without which further capacity increases should not be discussed.

Evaluate the condition of billfish in the EPO

Recreational fisheries in the EPO generate dynamic economies and thousands of jobs in many IATTC member countries, including Canada, the United States, Mexico, Guatemala, Costa Rica, and Panama, among others. Billfish species such as marlins and sailfish sustain these fisheries, and there is a legitimate interest in keeping them healthy. However, the IATTC still lacks an assessment of the status of billfish and sailfish stocks that would guide the adoption of conservation measures in the EPO and improve the development of economies that depend on recreational fishing, or sport and tourism fishing, as it is known in some countries. We respectfully request that delegates consider including these assessments in the Commission's research plans and then report back to the Commission on the progress and recommendations that the scientific staff considers important to restrain potential increases in bycatch mortality in the various tuna fisheries and rebuild the abundance of these species in the EPO.

Integrate recreational fisheries into the IATTC Strategic Scientific Plan 2026-2030.

The 2024 Eastern Pacific Ocean Tuna Fishery Report notes that recreational catches of billfish are poorly documented and, unlike industrial fisheries, are characterized by catch-and-release practices, so recreational fisheries have a much lower impact on fishing mortality for these species. At the same time, the scientific staff's recommendations to the Commission in 2025 confirm that tropical tuna stocks are in healthy condition, albeit with moderate risks for bigeye tuna, and highlight that current conservation measures have been effective in stabilizing stocks. This scenario of relative stability opens an opportunity to develop research and adopt conservation measures for other species in the EPO's pelagic ecosystem, including billfish and sailfish. It is recommended that the Commission include recreational fishing in the 2026-2030 Strategic Science Plan and beyond, seeking to coordinate data collection from these fisheries and developing management models that aim to ensure the long-term health of recreational fisheries. Including this perspective can improve the plan and consolidate a regional governance model that recognizes recreational fishing as an example of responsible non-extractive use and a generator of prosperity. In this effort, the Commission can count on initiatives such as the Central American Sportfishing Alliance (CASA) as a strategic partner, which seeks to strengthen regional governance, cooperation between countries, and the promotion of recreational fishing as an engine of conservation and sustainable development.