

World Wildlife Fund

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worldwildlife.org



Dear Delegates,

The vessel owners and industry participants of the **US Pacific Tuna Group** fishery improvement project (FIP) in the Eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO) submit this letter—in line with the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF) position statements—to acknowledge progress to date in the IATTC and to request additional support from CPCs for measures that will further tuna conservation at the Commission meeting from November 30th to December 4th, 2020.

This FIP recognizes—and is experiencing—the unprecedented challenges presented by COVID-19 and its economic and social impacts on the fishery sector in the Pacific Ocean. However, we do not believe that these current circumstances should prevent the IATTC from taking action to ensure sustainable management of tuna stocks and marine ecosystems. Indeed, there is more than ever a dire and critical need for coordination among industry, fisher communities, and relevant governments to achieve these outcomes.

The priorities reflected here are included in the FIP to help the fishery be eligible to meet the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) standard for certification. The FIP outcomes-to-date include best-practice examples of how this FIP is working to achieve conservation outcomes within the IATTC.

2020 Priorities

Precautionary Harvest Strategies

We encourage IATTC Contracting Parties and Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties (CPCs) to expedite the process of adopting precautionary and ecosystem-based management measures, including biological reference points, harvest control rules, increased observer coverage, national management measures and monitoring efforts adequate to ensure harvest strategy objectives are being met for all tuna species under IATTC jurisdiction. As such, renewing conservation measures for yellowfin, bigeye, and skipjack species is of high priority.

We support the IATTC staff and Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) recommendation to establish a triennial cycle of assessment and management for tropical tuna fisheries. Additionally, we support the staff's work plan to improve these stock assessments of tropical tunas, which are now included in a risk-analysis framework.

The role of management strategy evaluation (MSE) is integral to support precautionary and effective harvest strategies. We seek member state delegations to advocate and ensure sufficient funding so that the MSE processes can be continued.

Noting that current fleet capacity in the convention area is nearly double the IATTC's target level, we support CPCs to finalize a management plan to eliminate overcapacity in the convention area.

Reduce the environmental impacts of purse seine fishing

We encourage the IATTC to develop and implement science-based and enforceable FAD deployment limits to mitigate harm to ecosystems. We support research, strategies, and incentives that promote a transition to more biodegradable FADs within a determined set timeframe. We urge that any required actions are accompanied by compliance systems that are both effective and fully implemented.

This FIP is committed to providing data on FADs, such as electronic position data, to improve the scientific monitoring and management of fisheries with FAD usage.

Additional measures must also be taken to mitigate incidental catch and maximize release survival of sharks, mobulid rays, cetaceans, and sea turtles. Particularly, we support adopting best practices for the safe handling and release of sharks. The effectiveness and implementation of compliance to these measures must be improved.

Effective and fair enforcement

At this year's meeting, we urge the Commission to undertake any opportunity to review and amend its transshipment regulation (C-12-07) and adopt substantive improvements to curtail opportunities for illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, trafficking, and labor abuses. We seek required real-time (or near real-time) reporting of transshipment activity and for any vessels who fail to comply to be added to the draft IUU vessel list. Transshipment at sea should be only allowed on fishing vessels with 100% observer coverage (human and/or electronic), and tuna transshipped at sea without observer certification should not access the market.

We support all actions to ensure a strong compliance process and contribute to transparent, fair, and effective enforcement within the IATTC.

The members of the Commission should present a compliance action plan for the identified infractions. In addition, the IATTC should continue discussions on how to respond to repeated and significant non-compliance.

Data quality and quantity

This FIP recognizes that comprehensive observer coverage is critically needed to contribute data to understand the health of stocks, as well as to monitor compliance. To this end, we collaborate in initiatives that support enriching data collection and compliance.

Additionally, we continue to support measures to ensure on-board observer safety and encourage a binding measure. The COVID-19 pandemic presents unprecedented challenges to the fishery, and we are committed to safeguarding the health and safety of those working aboard vessels, as well as for those in onshore communities. We ensure that any steps to relax or suspend observer coverage onboard is limited only to this emergency period.

During normal operations, the major purse seine vessels represented here continue to implement 100% observer coverage and support substantially increased coverage for other vessels, especially for major longline vessels. A progressive program to increase levels of observer coverage (human and/or electronic) to 100% for all purse seine and to 20% for longline vessels should be established. To achieve eventual 100% coverage, this program should immediately adopt best practices in electronic monitoring (EM) and electronic reporting (ER) standards, such as e-logbooks.

Compliance measures need to be continually strengthened, and non-compliant vessels must be identified and sanctioned.

FIP outcomes to-date

- Approved a comprehensive FAD Management Plan, based on the ISSF *Best Practices for FAD Management*, that commits to the following [non-exhaustive] actions to support the IATTC program:
 - Comply with flag state and IATTC reporting requirements for fishery statistics by set type, including filling out completely and accurately the logbooks by set type and submitting the data to required authorities and the IATTC;
 - Voluntary reporting of additional FAD buoy data as requested by the IATTC to support approved and budgeted scientific research. This may include both raw positional and echosounder data with sufficient time lag to ensure confidentiality;
 - Support science-based limits on the overall number of FADs used per vessel and/or FAD sets made. Additionally, the vessels in the FIP have agreed to voluntary limits on the number of FADs deployed well below the limits established by IATTC;
 - A timely transition to the use of fully non-entangling FADs to reduce ghost fishing;
 - Not deploying any “high entanglement risk” FADs according to the ISSF Guide for Non-Entangling FADs;
 - Testing of biodegradable materials for use in FAD construction;
 - Participation in collaborative research and testing of biodegradable FADs; and
 - The development and implementation of FAD recovery policies, best practices and programs.
- Collaborating with a tuna fishing gear manufacturer in Ecuador on an innovative biodegradable FAD design, which is currently undergoing early stage testing. A larger scale test by the fleet is planned for the 4th quarter of 2020 or 1st quarter of 2021. The results of this work may be shared with key scientists, management authorities, overlapping FIPs and other stakeholders, including working groups under the IATTC.
- Participating in a FAD retrieval feasibility study with the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) to identify potential hot spots for FAD beaching in the Pacific Islands, including the tracking of some FADs deployed in the IATTC management area. Ten years of archived locational data will be released to SPC by the buoy service providers. A second fleet of six purse seine vessels, operating exclusively in the EPO, is being added to study.
- Supporting the SPC Tuna Tagging Programme by providing real time echosounder buoy data to the tagging cruise vessel. Due to the support provided by the USPTG fleet, the SPC reported that a record number of tunas were tagged during the cruise.

For more information, access this FIP's *FisheryProgress.org* profile [here](#).

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