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POSITION

2020



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Oceans Practice

WWF POSITION STATEMENT FOR THE 95TH MEETING OF THE INER-AMERICAN TROPICAL TUNA COMMISSION

November 30th – December 4th, 2020

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) will not conduct its regular in-person meetings to address important conservation and management issues in 2020 but will host these meetings virtually instead. Despite these exceptional circumstances, the IATTC must assume its responsibilities and take decisive actions to ensure good management and conservation of tuna stocks and other species in the Eastern Pacific Ocean. It is understandable, given the circumstances, that the Commission has prioritized issues to discuss, and WWF emphasizes here the issues that must be urgently addressed at the 95th meeting of the Commission.

1. Tuna Conservation

Tropical tunas (yellowfin and bigeye)

At the 9th Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) meeting (May 2018), the Commission scientific staff concluded that the results of its stock assessment of bigeye in the eastern Pacific were not reliable enough to be used as a basis for management advice to the Commission. The following year, at the 10th SAC meeting (2019), the staff reached the same conclusion for yellowfin tuna.

The main problem with both assessments was that their results were very sensitive to the inclusion of new data. During 2019, IATTC staff executed a workplan to improve the stock assessments methodologies for tropical tunas that included external reviews by scientific peers.

Assessments prepared by the staff in 2020 show that the yellowfin stock is in good condition but do indicate that there is a 50% chance of overfishing for bigeye tuna. Scientists also have concerns about the continual increase of floating object sets, and their impact on the condition of the bigeye stock.

Responding to concerns of increased fishing pressure, IATTC scientific staff recommends maintaining the 72-day closure, as well as establishing an annual limit on FAD sets combined with individual vessel daily active FAD limits. Additionally, they are recommending improving the risk analysis and the stock assessment models, and to continue with the ongoing management strategy evaluation (MSE) process that began a couple of years ago.

WWF urges members of the IATTC to take action to ensure that IATTC's tropical tuna conservation measures C-17-02 and C-17-01 do not lapse and continue in 2021, and that the IATTC adopt effective measures to reduce/limit fishing mortality. Additionally, we ask that FAD management guidelines continue to be developed and refined, so that FAD limits (number of sets, number of active FADs allowed per boat, etc.) are science-based.

WWF also supports the IATTC staff's and SAC's recommendation to establish a triennial cycle of assessment and management for tropical tuna fisheries in the Eastern Pacific. We recommend that the assessment models that have previously served as a basis for risk analyses continue to improve.

Pacific Bluefin Tuna:

Technical reports from all scientific and management bodies responsible for the management of the Pacific Bluefin tuna stock—including the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific Ocean (ISC) and the IATTC—indicate that while the Pacific Bluefin tuna stock is recovering, it remains in extremely poor condition. The updated stock assessment by the ISC in 2020 confirmed that:

- The stock has recovered to 28,000 tons but it is still only 4.5% SSBo
- In the last three years, the stock of juvenile Pacific Bluefin tuna (aged 0 to 2) has significantly increased, as a result of reduced fishing mortality by conservation management measures.
- Most recent recruitments (2017-2018) were smaller than assumed in the low-recruitment scenario used for projections conducted by the ISC in 2020
- The stock remains overfished and is subject to overfishing

WWF also recommends that the IATTC extends the provisions of Resolution C-18-01 for the conservation of Pacific bluefin tuna through 2021 – 2022, as well as develop a Catch Documentation Scheme (CDS) for the thorough monitoring of this species to ensure proper stock assessments.

WWF continues to urge the IATTC to adopt harvest control rules that are well-defined, pre-agreed, and that contain mandatory actions for a determined course of management, which is in response to changes in indicators of stock status with respect to reference points through the ongoing MSE process.

2. Review of Harvest Strategies

The implementation of precautionary fishing policies, guided by reference points and harvest control rules, allow managers to act swiftly and efficiently under a pre-agreed standard to ensure that catches do not exceed any acceptable limits. Thereby, this ensures the sustainability of the resource and the consistent supply of fish to our markets. The adoption of harvest control rules is a key aspect of modern fisheries management and is also a requirement for several ecolabel certification programs.

The current work undertaken by IATTC staff to conduct a management strategy evaluation (MSE) for tropical tunas in the Eastern Pacific will allow for testing the harvest control rules with respect to the limit and target reference points adopted in 2016 (C-16-02), as well as alternatives accounting for various uncertainties. Robust evaluation is key to informing Commission Members about the effectiveness of existing reference points and harvest control rules, compared to the alternatives, and to help guide the adoption of a permanent rule.

WWF urges the Commission to ensure its own financing, and seek additional funding, so that the MSE work plan that the scientific staff developed can continue. It is necessary to accelerate the MSE process as several already certified-fisheries depend on this process, as well as other fisheries with an interest in entering certification processes.

3. Management of FADS

WWF recognizes the efforts of the IATTC to improve FAD management by establishing a maximum limit in the number of FADs deployed per vessel type, a transition to non-entangling FADs by the fleet, scientific research to identify new ecoFAD prototypes, and data reporting requirements. However, there is an urgent need to adopt a comprehensive management strategy for these devices that addresses the collective best practices as outlined by the NGO Tuna Forum, i.e. a strategy that contemplates substantial improvements in the collection and reporting of data, technological innovation in bycatch mitigation, and clarification of terminology related to fishing with FADs.

Very few countries are delivering complete and timely information on FADs. It is very important that scientists have more detailed information on the type of FADs, their movements, and subsequent vessel catches, to move forward the adoption of science-based FAD management measures. WWF calls on Cooperating Parties, in accordance to Resolution C-19-01, to provide detailed data to the Commission that includes reports from the CPCs on whether or not they are complying with the previous provisions of the Commission to identify FADs deployed and to use prototypes of non-entangling FADs.

To reduce and minimize the impacts caused by FADs in marine ecosystems, WWF recommends the swift transitioning to biodegradable and non-entangling materials, as well as designing FAD recovery programs that include incentives to participate.

WWF strongly recommends that the IATTC develops and implements science-based FAD set limits consistent with management objectives for tropical tunas, and science-based limits on the overall number of FADs deployed.

4. Observer coverage of longline vessels over 20m length and small purse seine vessels

The low amount of information provided by member nations' observer programs (under the framework of Resolution C-11-08) reveals that 5% observer coverage is too low to accurately estimate the catch of infrequently caught species. WWF therefore supports SAC and scientific staff recommendations for a minimum of 20% observer coverage on large longline vessels,—until sufficient information is available to justify a revision (DOCUMENT SAC-11-15)—with the ultimate goal of reaching 100% monitoring through human and/or electronic means. WWF urges the Commission to enforce compliance of its existing 5% longline observer requirement, and for the Review Committee to identify and sanction non-compliant parties.

WWF urges the IATTC to require 100% observer coverage (human or electronic), on purse seine vessels of < 363 t of carrying capacity, that currently do not have an observer onboard. This will strengthen stock assessments and improve knowledge of these fishing vessels' impact on IATTC stocks.

5. IATTC Transparency

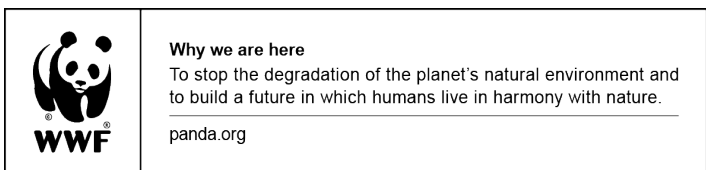
WWF urges the IATTC to increase the transparency of its compliance assessment process. Members' responses to areas of identified non-compliance should be made public and included in the Review Committee report, along with details regarding each members' and cooperating non-members' areas of non-compliance and recommendation to address non-compliance.

We request that the IATTC set clear milestones for improving compliance by requiring cooperating parties to submit a compliance action plan for identified infractions. Additionally, we ask for the Commission to begin discussions on how it will respond to repeated and significant instances of non-compliance. The Review Committee needs to make information and action plans that address gaps in compliance publicly available, in order to increase transparency, stakeholder engagement, pooling of resources to improve capacities, and accountability.

WWF urges the members and cooperating parties to ensure that their fleets and fisheries are free from slavery, forced labour, and poor labour conditions, and that they have appropriate measures in place to eliminate these practices.

6. FAO Port State Measures Agreement

WWF urges IATTC Contracting Parties to adopt port state measures at the regional level—as has been done by the CCSBT, IOTC, ICCAT, and WCPFC—that align with the 2009 FAO Agreement on Port States Measures to prevent, deter, and eliminate illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing (FAO PSMA). The Agreement has proven to be a cost-effective tool to combat IUU fishing by banning those products from entering the market. For this reason, WWF also asks all members who have not yet done so to ratify the 2009 FAO PSMA.



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