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OBSERVER'S REPORT OF THE 58TH MEETING OF THE INTER-AMERICAN TROPICAL TUNA COMMISSION

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ABSTRACT

This observer report summarizes major scientific subjects reported and discussed at the 58th meeting of the IATTC, which include stock status of tunas and dolphins.

RÉSUMÉ

Ce rapport d'observateur récapitule les principaux sujets scientifiques présentés et débattus à la 58ème réunion de la CIATT, ce qui comprend l'état du stock de thonidés et de dauphins.

RESUMEN

Este informe de observador resume los principales temas científicos presentados y discutidos en la 58ª Reunión de IATTC, que incluyen el estado de los stocks de túnidos y delfines.

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The 58th Meeting of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) was held during June 3-4, 1997 in San Jose, Costa Rica. The meeting was represented by 6 member countries out of 8 full member countries with observers from a total of 12 GOs , international organizations and NGOs. ICCAT was an observer among the attendants and represented by Ziro Suzuki. The following is a brief summary report about major scientific subjects in the Meeting.

1) The 1996 fishing year

Fishing in 1996 was a record high in the IATTC area, approximately east of 150W, a total of some 420 thousand tons for all principal market species (Table 1). The fishery had changed in the last few years, with the development of a large offshore fishing area south of the equator(Figure 1) and a dramatic increase in the catch of bigeye by the surface fishery, from 5,000 tons in 1993 to over 50,000 tons in 1996.

2) Status of stocks

Most of attention was drawn to yellowfin and bigeye stock status. Current study by the IATTC staff indicates that the yellowfin stock in the Eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO) is capable of supporting catches of some 260 to 300 thousand tons. Therefore, a catch quota for yellowfin for 1997, i. e., 220 thousand tons with three increments of 15 thousand tons each was recommended. However, concern was raised for possible results of dolphin-safe fishing (log-associated and free swimming schools) and fishing on dolphins. The former mode of fishing could reduce the future productivity of the fishery since large quantities of the smaller yellowfin are caught by this fishing mode.

Stock status of bigeye was most extensively discussed and argued among the

participants. Traditionally bigeye was caught primarily with longlines, but in recent years the purse seine catch in the EPO had increased tenfold mostly due to new fishing method with the use of the FADs, and was now greater than the longline catch, which had fallen considerably. The average weights caught by purse seine and longline caught in 1996 in the EPO were 9 kg and 59 kg, respectively. The implication of the increased catch of juvenile bigeye to longline fishery and the stock as a whole is not certain because of the fact that much less is known about the biology and population structure of this species than that of yellowfin and skipjack. However, preliminary analysis based on several assumptions, most importantly about natural mortality coefficient, suggested that the increasing the purse seine catch reduced the longline catch, and the stock might be overfished.

Precautionary approach should be taken to prevent possible aggravation of the stock status while ways would have to be found of controlling the bigeye catch without constraining the catch of skipjack, which could support higher levels of catch. Since the matter is urgent, it was suggested by the Director of Investigation of the IATTC that a working group of experts on this issue be formed by various nations and the results of their works be reported to the next IATTC meeting. It should meet as often as possible, and consider such management options as limiting fishing areas, seasons, or the use of certain gears, especially FADs. After discussion among the participants, the resolution for bigeye was approved (Attachment 1).

3) Tuna-dolphin issues

The IATTC Tuna-Dolphin Program has been successful to reduce incidental dolphin kill from over 200 to 2.5 thousands during the two decades and various dolphin stocks distributed in the EPO seems healthy. At the current level of mortality, the future growth of the dolphin populations should be independent of the fishery.

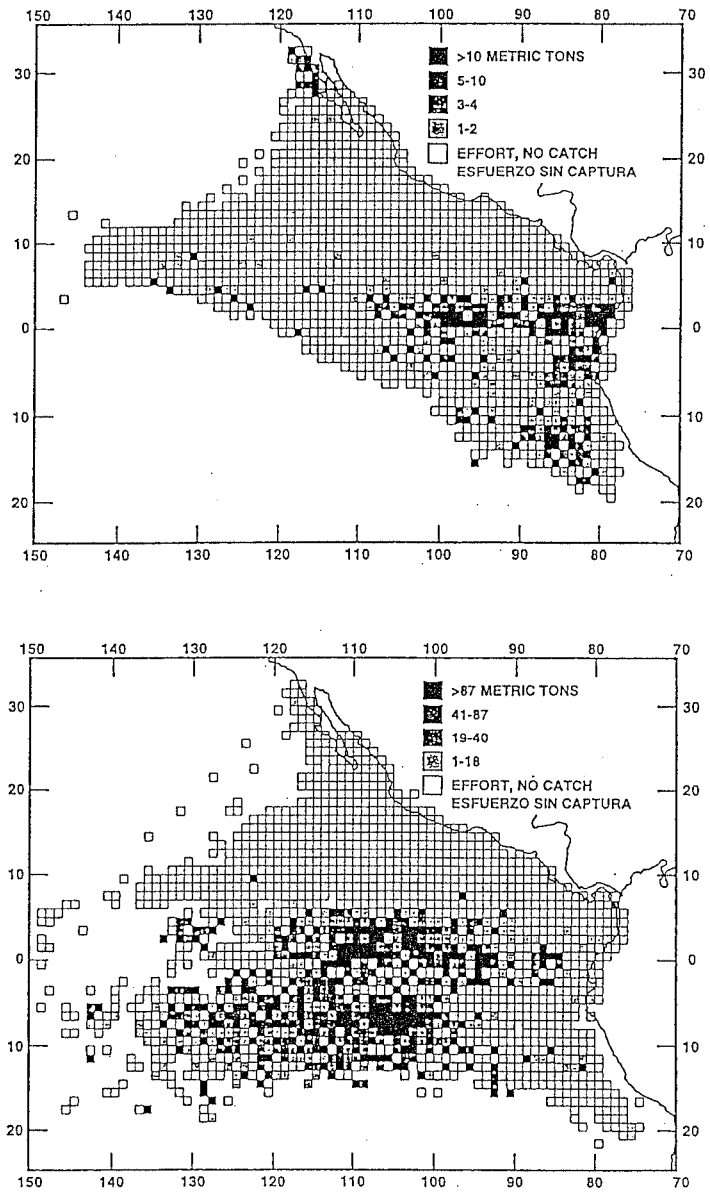

Figure 1. Distribution of bigeye catch by purse seine boats in the EPO during 1981-1995 (above) and during 1996 (below).

After Figs 7 and 8 of Background Paper 1 entitled "The 1996 Fishing Year" by IATTC for 58th meeting of the IATTC prepared May 30, 1997

Table 1. Estimated catches by surface gear, in metric tons, of the eastern Pacific tuna fleet. The abbreviation used in the table are as follows:YF, yellowfin; SKJ, skipjack; BET, bigeye tuna; BEP, bonito; ALB, albacore; BKJ, black skipjack; Misc., other species including sharks, other tunas, and miscellaneous fishes; CYRA, Commission's Yellowfin Regulatory Area; Outside, area between the CYRA and 150W. The 1996 data are preliminary. Additional information concerning this table is given in the text.

Year-- Año	YFT			SKJ	BET	BFT	BEP	ALB	BKJ	Misc.	Total
	CYRA	Outside	Total								
1961	102,643	0	102,643	68,461	213	8,135	2,908	2,422	0	214	184,997
1962	71,452	0	71,452	68,725	328	11,145	3,243	1,151	0	166	156,210
1963	62,028	0	62,028	95,557	75	12,272	3,123	3,422	0	240	176,717
1964	88,650	0	88,650	59,258	68	9,217	6,702	3,331	5	225	167,456
1965	78,898	0	78,898	78,194	117	6,888	4,049	644	16	155	168,962
1966	80,611	0	80,611	60,482	266	15,897	4,454	1,941	9	422	164,083
1967	79,959	0	79,959	120,655	1,664	5,888	10,044	3,750	0	115	222,076
1968	100,921	1,095	102,016	71,109	2,559	5,976	7,958	4,495	0	126	194,238
1969	111,424	17,434	128,858	59,068	576	6,926	2,950	2,944	0	1	201,323
1970	127,793	27,833	155,626	56,020	1,332	3,966	4,738	4,476	0	27	226,186
1971	102,194	20,645	122,839	104,721	2,566	8,360	9,600	2,490	6	61	250,642
1972	136,515	40,612	177,128	33,409	2,238	13,347	8,872	4,832	601	367	240,795
1973	160,341	44,912	205,253	43,954	1,979	10,744	7,864	2,316	1,674	355	274,139
1974	173,180	37,184	210,364	78,803	890	5,617	4,436	4,783	3,742	985	309,620
1975	158,843	43,299	202,142	123,868	3,723	9,583	16,838	3,332	511	277	360,275
1976	190,216	46,111	236,327	126,161	10,186	10,645	4,370	3,733	1,526	1,327	394,274
1977	182,676	16,140	198,817	86,337	7,055	5,473	11,275	1,963	1,458	1,950	314,328
1978	165,985	14,549	180,534	169,810	11,714	5,397	4,837	1,745	2,162	806	377,004
1979	175,906	13,768	189,674	132,024	7,532	6,117	1,805	327	1,366	1,249	340,094
1980	131,853	26,888	158,740	130,420	15,421	2,939	6,110	600	3,680	953	318,863
1981	157,733	24,080	181,813	119,606	10,091	1,089	5,918	753	1,911	1,010	322,191
1982	106,846	18,216	125,062	98,685	4,102	3,150	2,121	553	1,338	783	235,794
1983	82,001	12,230	94,231	58,104	3,260	853	3,829	456	1,236	1,709	163,679
1984	128,559	16,502	145,061	60,551	5,936	881	3,514	5,351	666	987	222,947
1985	192,543	24,449	216,992	49,460	4,532	4,055	3,604	867	296	536	280,342
1986	228,125	40,149	268,274	63,552	1,939	5,085	490	134	595	1,140	341,208
1987	248,153	24,094	272,246	62,345	776	1,005	3,326	417	557	1,612	342,284
1988	267,223	20,811	288,034	85,366	1,053	1,424	9,550	288	1,267	1,297	388,279
1989	242,342	47,033	289,375	92,374	1,470	1,170	12,095	1	783	1,072	398,339
1990	226,422	46,864	273,286	72,619	4,712	1,542	13,856	184	792	944	367,934
1991	219,407	19,545	238,952	63,259	3,740	461	1,288	833	446	649	309,630
1992	221,309	18,540	239,849	83,964	5,497	1,999	978	306	104	762	333,459
1993	213,258	18,813	232,071	87,357	8,069	879	599	1	104	314	329,395
1994	196,345	22,042	218,387	75,320	29,375	1,062	8,607	85	188	419	333,444
1995	196,009	27,603	223,612	138,520	36,941	875	8,088	506	187	336	409,065
1996	219,983	29,334	249,317	107,975	52,132	6,820	633	0	615	1,023	418,516

Cited from "The 1996 Fishing Year", Back ground Paper 1 by the IATTC presented to the 58th meeting of the IATTC.

RESOLUTION

The Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC), having responsibility for the scientific study of the tunas and tuna-like fishes of the eastern Pacific Ocean, and for recommending proposals, based on scientific evidence, for joint action by the High Contracting Parties designed to keep the populations of fishes covered by the Convention at levels of abundance that will permit the maximum sustained catches,

1. *Notes* that the annual catches of small bigeye tuna taken in the purse-seine fishery of the eastern Pacific Ocean have increased during the past few years from less than 5,000 metric tons to more than 50,000 metric tons;
2. *Recognizes* that such increases are likely to cause a reduction in the overall catches of bigeye tuna from the eastern Pacific;
3. *Notes* that a limitation of mortality generated by purse-seining for bigeye associated with floating objects to 1996 levels would prevent exacerbation of the problem;
4. *Expresses concern* that the fishery for bigeye associated with floating objects results in elevated catches of unmarketable bigeye as well as many other associated species being discarded to the sea dead;
5. *Recalling* that Article 5 of the United Nations Agreement for the implementation of the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks requires coastal states and fishing states to, *inter alia*, (1) adopt measures to ensure long-term sustainability of straddling fish stocks and highly migratory fish stocks and promote the objective of their optimum utilization, (2) ensure that such measures are based on the best scientific evidence available and are designed to maintain or restore stocks at levels capable of producing maximum sustainable yield, (3) apply the precautionary approach in accordance with Article 6 of the Agreement, (4) minimize pollution, waste, discards, catch by lost or abandoned gear, catch of non-target species of both fish and non-fish species, (5) protect biodiversity in the marine environment and (6) take measures to prevent or eliminate overfishing and excess fishing capacity;
6. *Noting* that the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries calls on states, international organizations, and all those involved in fisheries to collaborate in fulfilling the objectives and principles of the Code, which include taking measures to prevent or eliminate excess fishing capacity and ensuring that levels of fishing effort are commensurate with the sustainable use of fishery resources; in the case of new or exploratory fisheries, adoption as soon as possible of cautious conservation and management measures, including, *inter alia*, catch limits and effort limits which should remain in force until there are sufficient data to allow assessment of the impact of the fisheries on the long-term sustainability of the stocks; and take appropriate measures to minimize waste, discards, and catch of non-target species, both fish and non-fish species;
7. *Recalling further* that the Declaration of Panama, concluded and adopted in October 1995 by twelve governments, and supported by five environmental groups, to formalize the La Jolla Agreement as a binding legal instrument which requires, *inter alia*, a commitment to adopt conservation and management measures that ensure the long-term sustainability of tuna stocks, and that such measures shall be designed to maintain or restore the biomass of harvested stocks at or above levels capable of producing maximum sustainable yields; and
8. *Noting* that the Declaration of Panama also calls on governments to take measures to avoid, reduce and minimize the bycatch of juvenile tuna and bycatch of non-target species, therefore:
9. *Concludes* that action should be taken to limit or reduce the fishing mortality of small bigeye tuna in the eastern Pacific Ocean to the levels observed in the fishery in recent years, the exact levels of such limitations and/or reductions to be considered at the 1998 Annual Meeting of the IATTC; and
10. *Requests* the staff of the IATTC to convene a Working Group of experts to evaluate possible management options which can be implemented to achieve the objectives detailed in Paragraph 9, including consideration of, *inter alia*, closed areas, closed seasons, prohibitions and/or limitations on the use of certain types of fishing gear, global catch quotas, and individual vessel quotas; and
11. *Finally recommends* that the Working Group shall meet as frequently as necessary to achieve its objectives, but shall report to the High Contracting Parties its recommendations for conservation and management measures to achieve the objectives defined in Paragraph 5 above no later than the next Annual Meeting of the IATTC.

After Appendix 5. of Minutes of the 58th meeting of the IATTC