



INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE CONSERVATION OF ATLANTIC TUNAS

2009 Annual ICCAT Meeting Press Release

16 November, 2009

ICCAT fortifies its management of bluefin tuna fisheries

RECIFE, BRAZIL – The International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas held its 21st Regular Meeting from the 9th to the 15th of November, 2009. The Government of Brazil hosted the meeting in Porto de Galinhas (Recife), Brazil. The meeting focused on the management of key stocks such as Atlantic bluefin tuna, Atlantic swordfish, northern Atlantic albacore tuna, and several bycatch species. ICCAT took crucial steps to tighten monitoring and control measures for bluefin tuna fisheries.

ICCAT takes additional actions to rebuild bluefin tuna stocks and to strengthen controls

Atlantic bluefin has been the focus of attention from the general public and many interest groups due to substantial overfishing in recent years, especially in the Mediterranean Sea. In 2006 and 2008, ICCAT took increasingly restrictive management measures to halt the overfishing and to implement a rebuilding plan through 2022 for the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean stock. ICCAT members that participate in this fishery have made substantial sacrifices, especially in 2009, to reduce fleet capacity, to reduce overall catches and to substantially improve monitoring and control of the fisheries. At this 2009 annual meeting, the Commission agreed to even stronger measures that will be implemented in the 2010 fishing season and that are expected to accelerate rebuilding of the stock to levels that can produce maximum catches at sustainable levels. These include:

- A lower total allowable catch of 13,500 tons in 2010, in line with the recommendations of the Commission's scientific committee.
- An agreement to establish, at the next annual meeting, new management measures for future years that will allow the stock to rebuild with 60% probability, in accordance with advice expected from the scientific committee.
- Further reductions in fishing capacity.
- A limit on the number of joint fishing operations that can be carried out.
- An observer program with 100% coverage of purse seine and farming activities.
- A comprehensive catch documentation system that will track bluefin tuna products from the point of catch to the first point of sale, whether nationally or internationally.
- Reporting of catches close to real-time, allowing for close monitoring of quota consumption.
- A penalty schedule for members who do not comply with these management measures.

Tough on compliance

In 2009, ICCAT's Compliance Committee adopted a new way of working, to carry out a review of all obligations of the Contracting Parties, one by one. This was an extremely time-consuming process, but members agreed that it is an excellent working methodology that will result in improved reporting as well as improved compliance with management measures. As a result, a number of Contracting Parties will receive official letters that will identify the problems encountered and highlight the corrective measures that need to be put in place.

Atlantic Swordfish – A success story

ICCAT scientists met in September 2009 to assess the status of Atlantic swordfish stocks and confirmed that the North Atlantic stock has rebuilt to above the target set by the Commission's management plan (the biomass that could sustain maximum catches). The rebuilding plan began in 2000 and included minimum size restrictions as well as quotas. At this annual meeting, ICCAT agreed to new management measures for 2010, setting a quota of 13,700 tons which should maintain the stock's biomass at a healthy level. ICCAT also agreed on similar management measures for the southern Atlantic stock which is also at a healthy level, with an annual TAC of 15,000 tons each year during 2010-2012.

The Mediterranean swordfish fisheries are closed in October and November each year. ICCAT members will now be required to submit more detailed data, with a view to developing more specific time/area management measures in the future. In addition, the Commission will establish a list of vessels authorized to fish for this stock.

Strengthened oceanic shark management

While ICCAT is not directly responsible for the study and management of elasmobranchs, it is concerned about the management of tuna fisheries in which oceanic sharks are caught either incidentally or as one of the target species. Starting in 2004, ICCAT has adopted binding management measures for sharks, aimed at limiting shark-finning and protecting the least productive species. Various members will be studying the practicality of adopting measures in the future that require the landing of all sharks with their fins naturally attached to the bodies. This year, the retention of bigeye thresher sharks has been prohibited, and the Commission has discouraged tuna fisheries to target all other thresher shark species.

Bigeye tuna management program extended through 2010

The Commission extended the existing management measures for Atlantic bigeye tuna, one of the main species of tropical tunas, to apply during 2010. A Total Allowable Catch of 85,000 tons has been established for 2010, which should allow the stock to continue at a healthy level (recent catches are in the order of 70,000 tons). In addition, at its annual meeting in 2010, the Commission plans to take a closer look at the possibility of expanding the time/area closure in the management plan, which aims to reduce the catch of juvenile bigeye in a part of the Gulf of Guinea where they are common during the months at the end of the year.

Northern Albacore tuna management

According to the 2009 assessment of northern Atlantic albacore, the stock's biomass is below the target as it has been experiencing overfishing. The Commission has established a management plan for 2010-2012 that involves a Total Allowable catch of 28,000 tons, which should end overfishing and allow the stock to rebuild to its target level of maximum sustainable catches.

Constructing the future

ICCAT is the second oldest tuna Regional Fishery Management Organization (RFMO), with a Convention that dates back to 1966. This year ICCAT initiated a process of reflection in order to become a more effective and efficient organization. This process is spearheaded by the Working Group on the Future of ICCAT which met in Sapporo, Japan. The Working Group has made recommendations to the Commission for better addressing a breadth of issues, from resource allocation, to bycatch mitigation, to consideration of ecosystem approaches to management, and for strengthened monitoring and control measures. ICCAT members are also actively involved in the joint meetings of Tuna RFMOs, in which the five RFMOs work together to harmonize and standardize the way in which they work to assess and manage fisheries.

Miscellanea

- The meeting was attended by over 350 delegates from 39 Contracting Parties – Algeria, Angola, Belize, Brazil, Canada, China P.R., the European Community, Côte D'ivoire, Croatia, France (on behalf of St-Pierre et Miquelon), Ghana, Guatemala, Iceland, Japan, Republic of Korea, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Mexico, Namibia, Nicaragua, Norway, Panama, Philippines, the Russian Federation, São Tomé e Príncipe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Syria, Trinidad & Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, the United Kingdom (on behalf of its Overseas Territories), United States of America, Uruguay, Vanuatu, and Venezuela. In addition, five non-Contracting Parties were present, as well as five inter-governmental organizations and thirteen non-governmental organizations.
- In 2009, ICCAT spent nearly 200,000€ in capacity-building activities. These funds from Brazil, E.C., Japan and USA were used for facilitating participation in scientific meetings, training workshops, sampling and observer programs, and to recover historical logbook data.
- The ICCAT record of vessels has been expanded in scope to include vessels of 20 m in length (down from 24 m). As a result, the list will now include a number of vessels that were slightly below the limit.
- A Working Group on Recreational Fisheries met immediately before the Commission meeting to discuss the nature and scope of sport and recreational fisheries that harvest ICCAT species. The Working Group has recommended the development of improved and standardized methods to better sample these fisheries.

- During the meeting in Recife, the Contracting Parties re-elected Prof. Fábio Hazin, Chairman of the Commission for a second 2-year term. Mrs. Zachia Driouich, from Morocco, and Mr. Papa Namsa Keita, from Senegal, were elected as first and second vice-chairs, respectively. The next annual meeting of ICCAT will be held in Paris, France, November 12-21, 2010. Other inter-sessional meetings will be held throughout the year; detailed venue information can be found as it becomes available in www.iccat.int, under "Meetings".

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