

ICCAT Newsletter

No. 23 February 2016

Message from the ICCAT Executive Secretary

The Secretariat is pleased to present its readers with ICCAT Newsletter No. 23, informing about the latest events and activities of our Organisation, in a new layout more appealing for readers. Over the last six months two particularly important meetings took place: i) The Scientific Committee of Research and Statistics (SCRS) Meeting, which provided the scientific advice to the Commission, particularly for those species for which stock assessments were conducted (blue shark and bigeye tuna), but also as regards other species such as bluefin and small tuna species. It is also worth mentioning that the SCRS also reviewed the implementation of the Science Strategic Plan for 2015-2020, as well as, the work developed by the Sub-Committee on Ecosystem Based Fisheries Management (an issue that ICCAT is taking the lead as regards tuna-RFMOs) and the progress made by the stock Assessment Methods Working Group on the use of Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) to evaluate Harvest Control Rules and Reference points. ii) The 24th Regular Meeting of the Commission that was held in St. Julian's (Malta), which adopted ten new Recommendations and three Resolutions that will enter into force on 4 June 2016. Moreover, a new Chair of the Commission was elected (Mr. Martin Tsamenyi, from Ghana), as well as new officers of the subsidiary bodies, which will serve a two-year term of office.



New staff joined the Secretariat: a Coordinator, an Administrative and Financial Officer and an Accountant for the Atlantic Ocean Tropical Tuna tagging Programme (AOTTP). Additionally, the Secretariat is in the process of hiring a Publicity and Tagging Recovery Officer and a Website and Database Consultant for AOTTP. These hirings will strengthen the capacity of the Secretariat to meet the new challenges related to AOTTP. Moreover, other Commission funded research and data collection programmes (bluefin tuna, sharks, small tunas and billfishes) are carrying out relevant works aiming at the provision of scientific advice, thus achieving the goals of the Commission more efficiently as regards fisheries management.

50th Anniversary of ICCAT

I would like to remind you that the ICCAT Basic Texts were adopted in May 1966 at the Rio de Janeiro Conference of Plenipotentiaries, with the participation of 16 countries and three as observers. Since the time of its creation, 50 years ago, ICCAT has had to face important challenges. In recent years, important efforts have been made to provide the Secretariat and the SCRS with the means to respond to new challenges that have arisen in research and management. Further steps are still required.



I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to all those that throughout the last 50 years have contributed to the establishment, functioning and improvement of ICCAT. Their support, permanent encouragement and collaboration have been crucial to ICCAT accomplish its mission. The 50th Anniversary is therefore a motive of celebration, but also an opportunity to further discuss and implement new measures that will ensure the sustainable exploitation of Atlantic tuna fisheries in the long run.

Driss Meski, *Executive Secretary*

Gozo, Malta

RECENT MEETINGS

2015 Meeting of the Standing Committee of Research and Statistics (SCRS)

The SCRS held its meeting from 21 September to 2 October 2015, in Madrid, Spain.

The report of the meeting was published as part of the ICCAT Biennial Reports and the electronic version is available on the ICCAT website:

https://www.iccat.int/en/pubs_biennial.htm



In 2015, the SCRS carried out **stock assessments** on **blue shark and bigeye tuna**. Moreover, the Committee carried out **data preparatory meetings** on **bluefin tuna** and **small tuna** species.

The **Working Group on Assessment Methods** is making progress on the use of Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) to evaluate Harvest Control Rules and Reference points and to design a simulation study to show how to include spatially changing oceanographic and environmental conditions into the stock assessment process.

The **Sub-Committee on Ecosystems** continued its work pertaining to by-catch related matters, review progress made in implementing the Ecosystem Based Fisheries Management (EBFM) and develop a list of key indicators and objectives for its implementation. ICCAT is taking the lead on EBFM and will promote a workshop to advance the exchange of ideas on the implementation of EBFM within each t-RFMOs. In addition, the Sub-Committee continued assessing the importance of the Sargasso Sea ecosystem to ICCAT.

The **Sub-Committee on Statistics** continued its work to improve the submission of Task I and II data and proposed a protocol for the reporting of zero catches which will solve some of the difficulties that CPCs had in the past while reporting zero catches.

The Committee also reviewed the implementation of the **Science Strategic Plan** for 2015-2020, recommending the Commission to support the development of this new mechanism by establishing a competitive research fund administered by the ICCAT Secretariat. The fund would be used to support the research activities identified in the Science Strategic Plan developed by the SCRS.

Regarding the activities conducted by the **Secretariat**, in addition to the normal activities developed on statistics, publications, data funds management and others, the Secretariat is dedicating (apart from the usual preparation of the majority of the datasets required by each assessment), substantial additional work to stock assessment activities, whether participating actively in the assessment processes or coordinating and managing external support to the SCRS work.



For more detailed information, please see:
<https://www.iccat.int/en/meetings.asp>

Tagging lottery, SCRS 2015



Tagging Lottery

The annual tagging lottery, created to promote the recovery of tags attached by different laboratories of the ICCAT Contracting Parties, was held on 28 September 2015, during the SCRS sessions. The €500 prizes were awarded in the categories of:

Tropical tunas/small tunas: The winning tag was recovered from a bigeye tuna by a Spanish national, 194 days after it had been tagged during the United States campaigns.

Billfish: The winning tag was recovered from an Atlantic blue marlin by a Venezuelan national.

Sharks: The winning tag was recovered from a blue shark by a Spanish national 642 days after it had been attached.

24th Special Meeting of the Commission

The 24th Special Meeting of the Commission was held in St. Julian's, Malta, between 10 and 17 November 2015. The meeting was opened by the European Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries of Malta, Mr. Karmenu Vella (Malta) and chaired by Mr. Stefaan Depypere (EU). The hospitality and the excellent organisation by the Maltese Government ensured the smooth running of the meeting.



The Commission officers were elected at the meeting. Mr. Martin Tsamenyi (Ghana) was elected as Chair of the Commission and Mr. Stefaan Depypere (EU) and Mr. Raul Delgado (Panama) were elected First and Second Vice-Chairs, respectively. Moreover, Mr. Fabrizio Donatella (EU) was elected as Chair of the Permanent Working Group. Mr. Derek Campbell and Ms. Sylvie Lapointe were reelected as Chairs of the Compliance Committee and STACFAD, respectively. Regarding the Panels, Côte d'Ivoire, Japan, South Africa and Brazil were also reelected to chair Panels 1, 2, 3 and 4, respectively. All the officers were unanimously elected and will serve a two-year term of office.

The Chairman reiterated that science should remain the principal basis for decision making and for implementation of management measures. The Chair stressed the need to make progress on the Convention amendment and carry out work on the organization of the second performance review.

Meeting output: In the range of the scientific advice provided by the SCRS (bigeye tuna stock is currently at risk of being overfished), the Commission adopted the "*Recommendation on a Multi-annual Conservation and Management Programme for Tropical Tunas [Rec. 15-01]*", with a complete set of provisions on catch limits (bigeye and yellowfin), fishing capacity limitations, FAD fishing regulation, area/time closures, control and surveillance, etc. In particular, the bigeye annual Total Allowable Catch (TAC) was set at 65,000 t for 2016, 2017, and 2018.



The yellowfin TAC was maintained at 110,000 t for 2016 only (to be revised in the light of the 2016 stock assessment). It is expected that, this multi-annual programme will allow the bigeye stock to recover and be optimally exploited in the future. The Commission also adopted the "*Recommendation by ICCAT to Establish an Ad Hoc Working Group on Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) [Rec. 15-02]*" which reinforces the Terms of Reference (broader scientific and collaborative approaches) of this Working Group, established in 2015.

BFT tagging, Larache, Morocco

At its 24th Special Meeting, the Commission adopted the following **ten Recommendations** and **three Resolutions**, which will enter into force on **4 June 2016**:

Recommendation by ICCAT on a Multi-annual Conservation and Management Programme for Tropical Tunas [**\[Rec. 15-01\]**](#).



Recommendation by ICCAT to Establish an Ad Hoc Working Group on Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) [**\[Rec. 15-02\]**](#).

Recommendation by ICCAT for the Conservation of South Atlantic Swordfish [**\[Rec. 15-03\]**](#).

Recommendation by ICCAT to Establish Harvest Control Rules for the North Atlantic Albacore Stock [**\[Rec. 15-04\]**](#).

Recommendation by ICCAT to Further Strengthen the Plan to Rebuild Blue Marlin and White Marlin Stocks [**\[Rec. 15-05\]**](#).

Recommendation by ICCAT on Porbeagle caught in Association with ICCAT Fisheries [**\[Rec. 15-06\]**](#).

Recommendation by ICCAT on the Development of Harvest Control Rules and of Management Strategy Evaluation [**\[Rec. 15-07\]**](#).

Recommendation by ICCAT Amending Deadlines of two ICCAT Recommendations [**\[Rec. 15-08\]**](#).

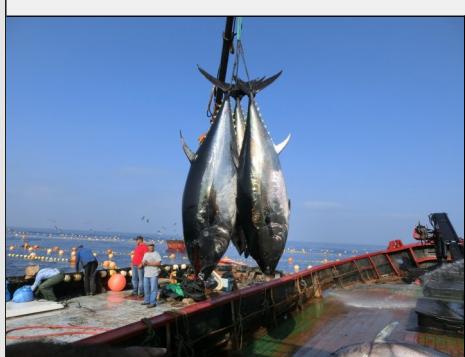
Resolution by ICCAT Establishing Guidelines for the Implementation of the Recommendation [Rec. 11-15] by ICCAT on Penalties Applicable in the Case of Non-Fulfilment of Reporting Obligations [**\[Res. 15-09\]**](#).

Recommendation by ICCAT to Clarify and Amend Aspects of ICCAT'S Bluefin Tuna Catch Documentation Programme to Facilitate the Application of the eBCD System [**\[Rec. 15-10\]**](#).

Resolution by ICCAT Concerning the Application of an Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management [**\[Res. 15-11\]**](#).

Resolution by ICCAT Concerning the Use of a Precautionary Approach in Implementing ICCAT Conservation and Management Measures [**\[Res. 15-12\]**](#).

Resolution by ICCAT on Criteria for the Allocation of Fishing Possibilities [**\[Res. 15-13\]**](#)

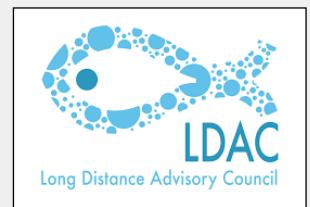


The full texts of the Recommendations and the Resolutions are available on the ICCAT website: www.iccat.int

BFT farm, Larache, Morocco

EXTERNAL MEETINGS

Since the publication of the last *Newsletter*, the Secretariat has been represented in external meetings related to ICCAT activities. Secretariat staff played an active role in the different meetings with oral and/or written presentation of documents:



Conference of the Advisory Council of the Long Distance Fleet in non-Community Waters (LDAC) on the external dimension of the CFP, 16-17 September 2015, Las Palmas, Spain

The Conference discussed the state of cooperation between EU and African countries, particularly regarding current fisheries agreement related to tuna species managed by ICCAT. The Executive Secretary specifically requested these agreements to be used for CPCs to comply with ICCAT adopted measures.



Second Conference "Our Ocean", 5-6 October 2015, Valparaiso, Chile

The Conference has again highlighted the concern related to the current weak condition of the Oceans worldwide, as a result of global warming, pollution and overexploitation of fishing resources. The discussions involved different themes such as the: increase of IUU and risks of overfishing; implementation of MPAs and the need of a broader involvement of Entities and Governments to assure the necessary funding.

Juridical tools available for fisheries and overall ocean management were presented, namely the United Nations Agreement on straddling and highly migratory fish stocks (1995 New York Agreement) and the role of RFMOs.

IOTC 6th Working Party on Methods, 19-22 October 2015, Montpellier, France

The meeting reviewed progress on the Management Strategy Evaluations (MSEs) being conducted for albacore, skipjack, bigeye and yellowfin in the Indian Ocean. Specific items covered operating model (OM) conditioning, the simulation platforms, a discussion of tentative harvest control rules, performance indicators and presentation, evaluation and visualisation of MSE results. Other items of interest were a tiered approach for providing stock status advice depending on data quality and collaboration across the tRFMOs on MSE.



Bluefin Tuna Symposium Meeting, 18-20 January 2016, Monterrey, California, USA

The meeting enabled the presentation of the latest scientific research and information on Atlantic, Pacific and southern bluefin tunas. Dialogue among symposium experts and participants was encouraged. Major goals and solutions that will build a sustainable future for all three species were also identified.

ICES Workshop to Compile and Refine Catch and Landings of Elasmobranchs,

19-22 January 2016, Lisbon, Portugal

The Secretariat presented an overview of all ICCAT fisheries data (Task I and II) on elasmobranchs (sharks and rays), namely regarding their structure, quality and completeness. A summary was also presented of tagging data for porbeagle shark, noting the substantial tagging information available for blue and shortfin mako shark species.



It was noted also the importance of the scientific collaborative efforts between ICCAT and ICES aiming the evaluations of shark stocks that have both important catches in the ICCAT pelagic fisheries and in national or regional fleets within the ICES areas, namely in the case of porbeagle stocks. It was pointed out the importance of this collaboration for future assessments of other shark stocks that share similar exploitation patterns.

ASSISTANCE FUNDS

In 2005 the Commission decided to make assistance to developing coastal States a permanent item on the Annual meeting agenda. Since then, the Commission has been formalizing assistance to developing ICCAT Contracting Parties through the adoption of specific recommendations, such as [Rec. 13-19](#) and [Rec. 14-14](#).

During the second half of 2015, travel arrangements have been made for participation by 80 people from 25 CPCs until 10 November 2015, which is double the amount in 2014.

Furthermore, the special Scientific Capacity Building Fund has financed the stay of a scientist from Côte d'Ivoire at Centro AZTI Tecnalia in San Sebastian (Spain) and a Tunisian scientist in NOAA in Miami (USA) in 2015.

SECRETARIAT ACTIVITIES

The Secretariat has continued to support the activities of the SCRS and the Commission. In particular, during the last quarter of 2015, the Secretariat focussed its efforts on preparing the SCRS and the Commission meetings.

Following the Commission meeting in Malta, the Secretariat began the preparatory work for the 2016 SCRS meetings and the 20th Special Meeting of the Commission, which will be held between 14 and 21 November. During this period, the Secretariat has also actively worked to implement the electronic BCD system.



Apart from the activities mentioned above, the Secretariat is responsible for maintaining the joint website of tuna RFMOs: <http://www.tuna-org.org/>

Tuna-org



REGIONAL OBSERVER PROGRAMMES

The Secretariat has continued to coordinate the implementation of the ICCAT Regional Observer Programme for At-Sea Transhipments and the Regional Observer Programme for Bluefin Tuna. In 2015, six CPCs participated in the ROP for transhipments and nine CPCs in the ROP-BFT, with a total of 15 observers embarked on cargo vessels and 122 on bluefin tuna fishing vessels. The total number of deployments in farming facilities in 2015 was 55, and there have been 4 new deployments to date this year (by 23 February 2016).



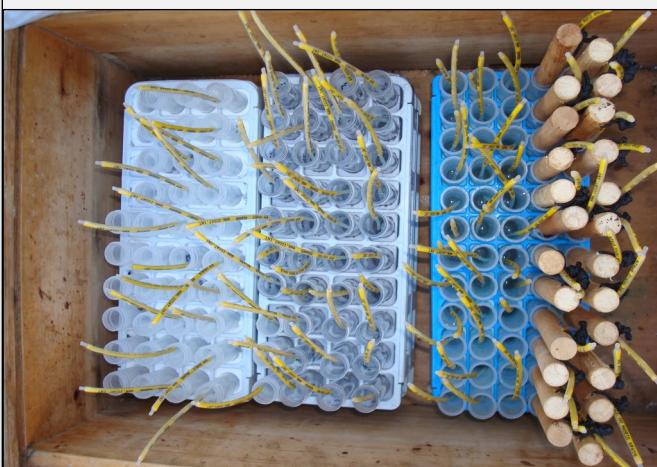
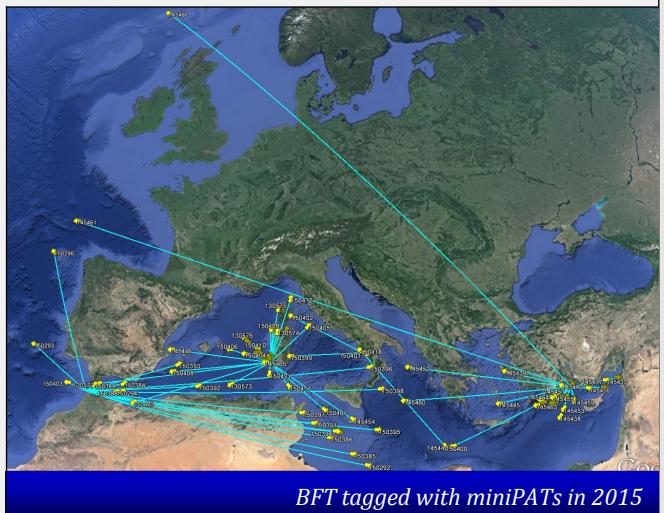
ATLANTIC-WIDE RESEARCH PROGRAMME ON BLUEFIN TUNA (ICCAT GBYP)

Phase 5 of the ICCAT GBYP has developed over the course of 2015 through February 2016 and has continued with the activities related to data recovery, biological studies, aerial surveys for spawning aggregations, tagging trials and modelling approaches. In 2015 it was possible to carry out the aerial surveys which covered more than 60% of the Mediterranean Sea. 82 specimens were tagged with electronic tags, which are providing new insights of bluefin tuna behaviour, finally clarifying some doubts about the Levantine Sea, and complementing ongoing genetic studies. At the same time, by using micro-chemistry data from the otoliths and the results from electronic tagging, it is now possible to better understand the migration patterns of bluefin tuna in the Ibero-Moroccan area. About 3,000 samples (otoliths, spines and tissue) were collected from 1,650 specimens to improve current knowledge on life history and origins of bluefin tuna.

The Core Modelling MSE Group, which held the last meeting in Monterrey (21-23 January 2016) has been working on modelling the fishing activity, as well as the results of tagging and aerial surveys. The first codes should be available in the following months.

Again this year, an additional draw was held supported by the ICCAT GBYP. There were three prizes in the draw, one for €500 and two for €1,000 exclusively for recoveries of bluefin tuna tags.

The winning tags and the prizes were as follows:



Conventional spaghetti tags (GBYP AZTI)

€1,000: Recovered by an Algerian national, 636 days after the fish release.

€500: Recovered by a Spanish national, 129 days after the fish release.

€500: Recovered by a Spanish national, 596 days after the fish release. The tagging was carried out during the Spanish campaigns.

More information available at:

<http://www.iccat.int/GBYP/en/index.htm>

ATLANTIC OCEAN TROPICAL TUNA TAGGING PROGRAMME (AOTTP)

AOTTP will collect, collate and analyze tag-recapture data for the three most important tropical Atlantic tuna species (skipjack, bigeye, and yellowfin) in addition to some coastal small tuna species which will be tagged *ad hoc*. The ambition is to tag at least 120,000 fish across the Atlantic during five years, using a range of conventional and electronic tags. All the data collected will be stored in databases maintained by the ICCAT Secretariat, and used to improve the estimation of key parameters needed for input to stock assessments. Fisheries scientists from relevant ICCAT Contracting Parties will be trained in tagging, data collection and the use of tag-recapture data in stock-assessment models. AOTTP will also work with recreational anglers on both sides of the Atlantic.



Since the last Newsletter, the Secretariat has filled the following three posts in relation to AOTTP: Mr. Doug Beare has been appointed as Coordinator; Ms. Seynabou Kebe as Financial Administrator; and Mr. Ricardo Pastor as Accountant. All three are “in-post” in Madrid. Advertisements for a Publicity and Tagging Recovery Officer and a Website and Database Consultant have also been published, and interviews of short-listed candidates took place in early February. Additionally a Call for Tender for the First Tagging-Recovery Programme (Phase 1) was launched, which will include the chartering of professional fishing vessels, the deployment of tagging and tag-recovery teams, data collection, scientific interpretation, the development and execution of training courses, and the instigation of awareness campaigns to promote tag-recovery.

SHARK RESEARCH AND DATA COLLECTION PROGRAMME (SRDCP)

Four major activities covering different aspects of the biology, stock structure and fisheries of the shortfin mako were initiated in 2015 under the auspices of the SRDCP.



First, a pan-Atlantic age and growth. Second, a population genetics study to estimate stock structure and phylogeography covering the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. Third, a post-release mortality study that focuses on pelagic longline fisheries has deployed the first two of 14 acquired mini Pop-up Archival Transmitting tags (miniPATs). Fourth, a study to gather and provide information on stock boundaries, migrations and habitat use, in which the first two of nine miniPATs were deployed.

For more info see: <https://www.iccat.int/en/ResProgs.htm>

ICCAT SMALL TUNAS YEAR RESEARCH PROGRAMME (SMTYP)

SMTYP continued the recovery of historical Task I and Task II data series and conducted biological sampling for the main small tuna species, reinforcing data mining and expanding this data recovery into other areas of the Western Atlantic and the Mediterranean Sea. This reinforcement of data mining would be necessary to improve Task I and Task II, aiming at small tuna stock assessments.

SMTYP has also been working on a Call for Tenders aiming at the collection of biological data and samples, including size data for the main species in the whole Atlantic and the Mediterranean. This Call was launched in February 2016.

ICCAT ENHANCED PROGRAMME FOR BILLFISH RESEARCH (EPBR)

EPBR continued its activities in 2015. In 2015, Dr. John P. Hoolihan (USA) assumed the role of overall Coordinator and western Atlantic coordinator, while Dr. Fambaye Ngom Sow (Senegal) assumed the role of Coordinator for the eastern Atlantic. The objectives of EPBR have recently been expanded to evaluate adult billfish habitat use, study spawning patterns and population genetics, as these studies are essential to improve billfish assessments.

Genetic sampling kits were distributed among a number of fleets (longliners in Mexico, Morocco, Portugal, Senegal, Spain and Venezuela; and to purse seine fleets in Ghana and Spain) to help identify the percentage of white marlin, longbill spearfish and roundscale spearfish in the mixture of landings that represent these three species.



To-date, surface mucous samples for genetic analyses have been provided by Portugal ($n = 39$) and Spain ($n = 1$) longline fleets fishing in the eastern central Atlantic. Of these, 36 were identified as white marlin and one sailfish, while three could not be identified due to mold contamination.

2016 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

In 2016, the following events are scheduled to be held:

February

- ICCAT Working Group on Stock Assessment Methods Meeting, 15-19 February, Madrid, Spain



March

- Panel 2 Intersessional Meeting , 2-3 March, Madrid, Spain
- Compliance Committee Meeting, 4-5 March, Madrid, Spain
- 3rd Meeting of the Working Group on Convention Amendment Meeting, 7-8 March, Madrid, Spain
- Yellowfin Data Preparatory Meeting, 7-11 March, Pasaia, Spain
- 2nd Meeting of the Ad hoc Working Group on FADs, 14-16 March, Bilbao, Spain

April

- Small Tunas Species Group Intersessional Meeting, 4-8 April, Madrid, Spain
- Shark Species Group Intersessional Meeting, 25-29 April, Madeira, Portugal
- Atlantic Albacore Stock Assessment Session, 28 April – 6 May, Madeira, Portugal

May

- Sailfish Stock Assessment Session, 30 May – 3 June, Miami, USA

June

- Yellowfin Stock Assessment Session, 27 June – 1 July, Pasaia, Spain



July

- Mediterranean Swordfish Stock Assessment Session, 11-16 June, Casablanca, Morocco
- Working Group on Integrated Monitoring Measures, Meeting 18-19 July, Sapporo, Japan
- Panel 2 Intersessional Meeting, 20-21 July, Sapporo, Japan
- Bluefin Tuna Data Preparatory Meeting, 25-29 July, Madrid, Spain

September

- Sub-Committee on Ecosystems Intersessional Meeting, 5-9 September, Madrid, Spain
- SCRS Species Groups meetings, 26-30 September, Madrid, Spain
- Sub-Committee on Statistics, 26-27 September, Madrid, Spain

October

- Meeting of the Standing Committee on Research and Statistics, 3-7 October, Madrid, Spain



November

- 20th Special Meeting of the Commission, 14-21 November

Additional information can be found at:
<http://iccat.int/en/meetingscurrent.htm>