



## **Opening Statement - 20th Special Meeting of the Commission**

Oceana would like to express its appreciation to Portugal for hosting the 20th Special Meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT).

This year ICCAT celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary since it committed to the overall objective of recovering highly migratory stocks (HMS) to sustainable levels and rebuilding such stocks on the basis of the best scientific advice available. And since 1966, substantial progress has been made in the sustainable management of these stocks.

But along that journey there have been unprecedented fisheries management challenges faced by the Commission that have sometimes called into question the mission and the credibility of this regional fisheries management organization (RFMO). Such is the case of the Eastern Bluefin tuna. In those dark days, the stock was on the verge of collapse as a consequence of ICCAT mismanagement. We must learn from those mistakes made then.

Today, at the 20<sup>th</sup> Special Meeting of the Commission we find ourselves at an impasse in the road to stock recovery yet again: the critical state and fate of another species.

This time it is the Mediterranean swordfish. This stock has the lowest biomass levels ever reported in ICCAT. It is overfished and has subjected to overfishing for over 30 years now. ICCAT has blatantly ignored scientific advice from the SCRS, which has been calling for a plan to rebuild this stock at Maximum Sustainable Yield since 2007. And so has Oceana. This year's 2016 stock assessment is a clear, red warning on a need for a recovery plan with a substantial reduction in catches.

ICCAT Contracting Parties cannot keep turning a blind eye to this important and iconic Mediterranean stock whose productivity is the same as the North Atlantic and South Atlantic stocks. Inaction is really not an option anymore.

Oceana once again encourages ICCAT and Contracting Parties to take the right direction – steered by scientific advice - to put Mediterranean swordfish on the road to being rebuilt by adopting a multi-annual recovery plan without any further delay.