

**ICCAT ANNUAL MEETING 2017**  
**Opening statement European Union**

The European Union is very pleased to attend this year's 25<sup>th</sup> Regular Annual Meeting of ICCAT in this wonderful country and historical city. We would like to express our very great appreciation for the Moroccan Government's hospitality and we are looking forward to a very successful meeting. It is very fitting that ICCAT should meet in this great maritime country, boasting thousands of kilometres of coastline, on both the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea, with the strong fishing traditions that this entails.

We would also like to thank the Executive Secretary, Driss Meski, and his talented team for organising this meeting and for hard work they will no doubt be performing during the course of this meeting.

In the next ten days, the eyes of the fishing world will be upon us, such are the expectations for this organisation as we strive to continue to raise the standards in terms of the fisheries management of tuna species. The Second Performance Review of ICCAT, conducted last year, is a great testimony to the progress ICCAT has made over the years. Once again, we are expected to show leadership by being prepared to take the difficult decisions that are required, no matter how long or difficult the road may be.

But our resolve and past efforts are starting to deliver noticeable results. There is no better example of this than the case of the Eastern stock of Atlantic Bluefin tuna, which 10 years ago was being branded worldwide as the embodiment of the failure of fisheries management, and which today has turned into one of the great success story. Scientists have for a few years now emphasised the steady and strong progress towards recovery of the stock and advised to review the management measures for this stock in light of its new improved status. We are looking forward to be able to take this long-awaited step this week by gradually moving away from the emergency measures adopted a decade ago to a more adapted framework, and to help those who have made sacrifices during the recovery period to be rewarded for their efforts. We are confident that this can be achieved while at the same time securing the sustainable management of this stock in the long term. We are also hopeful that solutions can be found to resolve long standing disputes related to the management of this fishery, and that this can result in a more inclusive process and enhanced participation by all CPCs to the work of the Commission.

We note at the same time with satisfaction the constant improvement in our understanding of the status of the stocks, thanks to the relentless work of SCRS. This is the result of strong collective efforts and forms the indispensable basis for the rational and sustainable management of the resources. The improvements in our understanding of the stocks status unfortunately also means that we are confronted with new emerging challenges which we will have to address with determination. This year SCRS brought to our attention the very worrying situation of the Northern and Southern stocks of shortfin mako sharks, a long lived slow growing species, a magnificent predator at the top of the food chain, which we have a duty to protect. We hope than we can take the courageous decisions required to protect this amazing fish and we have tabled a proposal to achieve this. The European Union will continue to promote the responsible and precautionary management of all shark species caught in association with ICCAT fisheries. This includes

the adoption of a policy on fins-naturally attached, for which a large majority of CPCs have now expressed their support for several years.

We also hope that this commitment to protect shark species can be enshrined in the ICCAT Convention, and that we will be able to successfully conclude the amendment process by finding consensus. The EU is ready to do its part towards achieving this aim and will be ready to show flexibility to facilitate an outcome at this year's meeting.

After several years of work by SCRS, and via a successful dialogue between scientists and managers, we are also hopeful that the Commission will for the first time be able to adopt harvest control rules for Northern Albacore. A lot of hard work and time has been put into this process and it is important that we now take the necessary decision. This should pave the way for managing other stocks through harvest control rules in the near future, demonstrating the commitment of the Commission to base its decisions on sound science and enhanced participation of all the stakeholders.

While perhaps not as worrying as shortfin mako, several stocks have nevertheless also been highlighted by SCRS as requiring our attention. We strongly believe that now is the time to take precautionary measures to ensure their long terms sustainability and that we should not wait for a worsening of the situation before assuming our responsibilities and take action. This will require reviewing some practices which in our view are no longer compatible with the sustainable management of fish stocks.

As always, this year the European Union continues to attach great importance to the compliance process. We believe that only full compliance by everybody ensures the effectiveness of the conservation measures adopted by the Commission and guarantees a level playing field across the entire Convention Area and among all ICCAT CPCs. We are therefore determined to ensure that ICCAT maintains a high level of commitment to the compliance review and assessment.

Finally, this year, three important figures of ICCAT are retiring. We would like to express our profound gratitude to Dr Antonio Di Natale and Dr Lawrence Kell for their exceptional contributions to the work of the ICCAT Commission. As we prepare to select a new Executive Secretary, we would also like to express our appreciation for the superb work done by Driss Meski in ICCAT. As one of the longest serving Executive Secretary in an RFMO, Driss has been instrumental in facilitating the work of the Commission, in always delivering very well organised meetings, by keeping a watchful eye on the financial situation of the organisation, and importantly by providing a constant and terrific support to the Parties. We wish these three great colleagues the very best for their retirement.

The European Union is looking forward to working constructively with all CPCs in order to achieve these ambitious goals at the 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of ICCAT.