ASSOCIATION OF NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS
OF FISHING ENTERPRISES IN THE EU

# EUROPECHE DECLARATION
## Priorities for the 25th extraordinary meeting of ICCAT

**(16th – 23rd November 2026, Vilamoura, Portugal)**

## Panel 1 on tropical tunas

*Brussels, 28 September 2026*

The International Commission for the conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) will hold its 25th ordinary meeting in Vilamoura, Portugal, from November 16th to 23rd, 2026. Europêche reminds the importance of this meeting for the sector, especially on yellowfin tuna allocation, FADs measures as well as their impact on the purse seine fleet's economic rentability. Compliance measures are also paramount to fight IUU fishing and ensure a level playing field to the European fleet in the Atlantic Ocean.

### 1. Transitioning from rebuilding to long-term sustainable management of tropical tunas

Europêche calls on CPCs to cooperate toward the adoption of catch limits and allocations that ensure the effective and equitable management of tropical tuna fisheries, noting that all three tropical tuna stocks are now in the green zone of the Kobe matrix, creating an opportunity to **move from rebuilding measures toward management approaches intended to secure long-term sustainability**:

- **Allocating the yellowfin tuna TAC among all CPCs** to ensure its effective implementation and that the catch limits are not exceeded as well as setting a TAC**, taking advantage of the possible increase of TAC up to 128.000 t.[1], which represents a probability of more than 50% to stay in the green quadrant of the Kobe plot**.
- **Setting the TAC of bigeye tuna at 86.030 tons**, considered sustainable by the SCRS[2].

Allocating yellowfin tuna to fishing CPCs is a necessity in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of the fisheries, that would be facilitated by a TAC increase.

[1] Point 13.1, table 3, p.16 of the 2025 SCRS report
[2] Point 13.2, table 1, p. 23 of the 2025 SCRS report

Under Rec. 24-01 (para. 3)[3], the bigeye tuna catch limit is set at 73,011 tons for 2025 and may increase after 2025 depending on the 2025 stock assessment, if there is at least 70% chance to keep the stock healthy by 2034. According to the Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS), this probability is currently at 91%. We then recommend that the Commission increase the TAC for bigeye tuna, up to the median sustainable yield: 86.030 t.

For both those stocks, the European tropical tuna purse seine fleet has achieved significant catch reduction efforts for bigeye those last years, which contributed to improve the stock status, but meant cutting the fleet by 62%, from 21 to 8 vessels under European flags.

Europêche then recommends that any future allocation of the yellowfin tuna TAC should safeguard the EU fleet's fishing opportunities in line with its historical catch levels and ensure that it benefits fairly from any future increase in the TAC, taking due account of the significant efforts and sacrifices already undertaken by the fleet..

## 2. Removing the FAD moratorium to restore fairness and operational efficiency in tropical tuna fisheries

In order to ensure the fair, effective and proportionate management of all fleets and gears, **Europêche calls on CPCs to remove the current FAD fishing moratorium**, which has shown limited biological benefit but severe socio-economic and competitive distortions:

- **Eliminating the FAD moratorium**, in light of the improved status of tropical tuna stocks new scientific evidence indicating that the convention-wide FAD closures implemented since 2020 have likely had only a minimal impact on Atlantic tropical tuna stocks.
- **Reinforcing monitoring, control, and compliance mechanisms** to ensure that all fleets operating under ICCAT rules, including non-EU fleets, are subject to the same obligations and oversight.
- **Ensuring that management measures are based on the relative contribution of each fleet to stock-specific fishing mortality, including by assessing targeted measures for longline** as these may deliver greater biological benefits for bigeye tuna than restrictions focused exclusively on FAD-associated purse-seine fishing
- **Establishing a Working Group on Socio-Economic Impacts** within ICCAT, following the example of other tuna RFMOs, to regularly assess how management measures affect fleets, coastal communities, and dependent industries

SCRS/2026/185 provides further evidence that the effectiveness of temporal closures depends primarily on whether they result in an actual reduction in annual fishing mortality. The analysis found no stock-level benefit when catches were fully reallocated to open periods.

It also shows that closure effects differ by fleet and stock: while closing the FAD-associated purse-seine fleet produced the largest fleet-specific benefits for yellowfin and skipjack, closing

[3] p. 23 of the 2025 SCRS report

the longline fleet produced the largest positive effect on bigeye spawning biomass, increasing end-of-projection SSB by up to around 17%. At the same time, longline closures could reduce MSY by up to around 12%, particularly for bigeye. Based on observed catch and effort patterns, the authors conclude that the convention-wide FAD closures implemented by ICCAT since 2020 have likely had a minimal impact on Atlantic tropical tuna stocks, as purse-seine fleets have largely redistributed fishing effort to open seasons.

At the same time, the most recent stock assessments indicate that **bigeye, yellowfin and skipjack are neither overfished nor subject to overfishing**, supporting a shift towards effective and proportionate long-term management measure.

Since the moratorium's introduction in 2016, the **European purse-seine fleet has experienced a 62% decrease in vessel numbers and a similar drop in catches between 2016 and 2025**. The STECF 2024 Annual Economic Report identifies the FAD closure as one of the main limiting factors affecting fleet productivity, citing reduced operational capacity and increased bureaucratic burdens.

The closure has also affected African coastal economies by disrupting direct supply to local markets (faux-poissons) and supply to canneries. At the same time, incomplete compliance by some non-EU fleets has created competitive distortions and weakened the measure's effectiveness. Europêche therefore calls for stronger ICCAT compliance action, including against repeated violations.

Finally, tuna stocks shall be managed through effective, operational and proportionate measures that demonstrably reduce fishing mortality, while taking due account of socio-economic impacts. Focusing only on purse seiners overlooks the potential for juvenile catch in other fisheries, which are less well-documented and lack reliable observation coverage, through high grading, discards, or inaccurate reporting.

Last year, although it was it was biological success, the EU's share of the bluefin tuna TAC has declined from 59.24% in 2015 to approximately 52% in 2026. This reduction of around 12% of the EU share shows that recovery alone does not automatically translate into improved economic opportunities for the European fleet and highlights the importance of defending the EU's interests in international quota negotiations.