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Global Fishing Watch Position Statement for the 25th Special Meeting of ICCAT

Global Fishing Watch is pleased to participate as an observer in the 25th Special Meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) in Vilamoura, Portugal, from November 16-23, 2026. We commend the Secretariat, the Chair, and Contracting Parties and Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties, Entities and Fishing Entities (CPCs) for their continued efforts to advance sustainable and transparent management of Atlantic tuna and tuna-like species, and we thank the European Union for hosting this meeting.

Global Fishing Watch recommends CPCs act on three policy priorities at the 25th Special Meeting: (I) strengthen vessel tracking requirements in ICCAT and adopt amendments to Recommendation 18-10 for authorized fishing vessels 20 meters or longer to continuously broadcast automatic identification systems (AIS); (II) consider a menu of concrete, sequenced steps to advance beneficial ownership transparency; and (III) align ICCAT's vessel data systems and the Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) Global Information Exchange System (GIES) and Global Record of Fishing Vessels, Refrigerated Transport Vessels and Supply Vessels (Global Record) to reduce reporting burden and strengthen cross-regional fisheries management organization (RFMO) consistency. Additionally, we highlight two new Global Fishing Watch resources that may support ICCAT stakeholders with these topics: [**"Vessel Tracking Best Practices Guide"**](#) and [**FAQs on AIS and vessel monitoring systems \(VMS\)**](#).

I. Amend Recommendation 18-10 to add AIS as a tracking tool

Context

AIS is a widely available technology that provides continuous tracking of fishing vessels equipped with transponders, which can support fisheries research, enhance monitoring and act as a backup to VMS. ICCAT [**Recommendation 18-10**](#) requires VMS for all vessels over 20 meters between perpendiculars or over 24 meters

in length overall (LOA), as well as any vessel over 15 m LOA authorized to fish in waters beyond the jurisdiction of the flag CPC. VMS data is only centrally collected, however, for vessels fishing bluefin tuna under [Recommendation 25-04](#). The absence of centralized VMS data and inconsistent implementation has limited the effectiveness of the system for monitoring and compliance. Using both AIS and VMS in conjunction would allow for cross-checking information, enhancing safety and better understanding fishing effort.

Momentum and applications for AIS use in ICCAT, and other RFMOs, are growing:

- At the 19th Meeting of the Working Group on Integrated Monitoring Measures (IMM), the European Union introduced a discussion paper (Document IMM12) on AIS and its benefits to increasing fishing effort analyses; combating illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing; and contributing to vessel monitoring. Global Fishing Watch strongly supported that discussion paper, noting that AIS provides a complementary tool and back-up to VMS that is publicly available, promotes transparency and adds another tool in fisheries monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS).
- The Standing Committee on Research and Statistics September 2026 meeting reviewed a Global Fishing Watch and International Seafood Sustainability Foundation paper on AIS (Document TRO_15/2026), and recommended in its [recent meeting report](#): “The Commission may wish to consider how authorized fishing vessels ≥ 20 m could improve reporting their activity by continuously broadcasting accurate and complete static AIS data, including the [[International Maritime Organization]] (IMO) number where assigned, [[Maritime Mobile Service Identity]] (MMSI), [[International Radio Call Sign]] (IRCS) and registered vessel name in addition to the CPCs’ VMS reporting.”
- In other fora, the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) requires AIS under [Conservation Measure 10-02](#) (2022). The Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) includes AIS as a monitoring option under [Resolution 24/03](#); the Seychelles also [proposed a binding measure](#) to add AIS into the IOTC VMS measure at the 30th IOTC Commission; and the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean Scientific Advisory Committee recently [recognized AIS as a tool in its 2026-28 work plan](#).

Addressing challenges

Global Fishing Watch's engagement across the 2025–26 period surfaced several recurring questions that we believe an ICCAT proposal – and Global Fishing Watch's [Vessel Tracking Guide](#) and [FAQs](#) – can help resolve:

- *Complementary source of information*: Several CPCs have questioned whether AIS and VMS should sit within the same measure, noting AIS was originally built as a safety tool. The proposal at hand treats AIS strictly as a complementary layer of information to VMS and recognizes its benefits beyond safety – improving continuity of monitoring where VMS coverage has gaps, enabling cross-verification of vessel positions, and supporting both compliance monitoring and safety at sea – not as a replacement for VMS.
- *Implementation timelines*: Some CPCs have raised the impracticality of near-term compliance with a possible AIS mandate, including a preference for a phased entry into force to allow time for national regulations to be adapted. Global Fishing Watch supports reasonable phase-in provisions (*i.e.*, 2028-2029) that preserve the measure's binding character while giving CPCs adequate time to meet these standards.
- *Operational and safety considerations*: CPCs with active piracy or security concerns in their waters have flagged the need for appropriate safeguards. Global Fishing Watch recognizes these valid concerns and recommends incorporating standard IMO exemptions that allow captains to temporarily disable AIS in high-risk zones, ensuring safety without delaying the overall adoption of the measure.

Recommendations

On vessel tracking, Global Fishing Watch encourages CPCs to:

- **Support adoption of a binding amendment to Recommendation 18-10 to include AIS as a complementary vessel-tracking tool alongside VMS.**
- **Ensure that the adoption of AIS calls for the continuous transmission of AIS, as well as accurate and complete static AIS data, including the IMO number where assigned, MMSI, IRCS and registered vessel name, alongside CPCs’ VMS reporting.**

Global Fishing Watch remains available to provide technical support, data analysis and briefings to CPCs and the Secretariat throughout the negotiation of this proposal.



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II. Advance beneficial ownership transparency in ICCAT

Context

Beneficial ownership transparency is an emerging pillar of sustainable fisheries management and combatting IUU fishing. Owners of IUU fishing vessels frequently conceal their identities through corporate structures, flags of convenience, and tax havens; research indicates 70% of vessels implicated in IUU fishing are, or have been, flagged to jurisdictions with hidden ownership (1). Momentum on this issue continues to build: In February 2026, the FAO Subcommittee on Fisheries Management “further urged FAO Members to upload and regularly update fleet information to FAO’s Global Record, including, where feasible and subject to relevant domestic laws, information on beneficial ownership, in order to support effective capacity monitoring, strengthen compliance and improve transparency.” Recognizing that beneficial ownership is a complex topic, Global Fishing Watch sets out a sequenced menu of steps that could improve beneficial ownership reporting and transparency in ICCAT:

Priority, tangible policy recommendations

1. Add a beneficial owner field to the ICCAT IUU Vessel List (Recommendation 23-16). Recommendation 23-16 already calls for beneficial ownership information for vessels included on the IUU Vessel List, but the published list has no dedicated field in which to record it or indicate its non-availability. Adding this field would be a foundational administrative step that gives effect to an existing requirement. It would also help authorities identify the persons who ultimately profit from IUU fishing, even when listed vessels change name or flag.
2. Require beneficial ownership information for carrier vessels (Recommendation 24-15). Carrier vessels sit at a critical point in the supply chain, where IUU catch can enter legitimate markets. Global Fishing Watch recommends amending paragraph 10 of Recommendation 24-15 so that the information flag States submit each year for vessels on the ICCAT Record of Carrier Vessels includes the name and address of the beneficial owner(s), where different from the registered owner. This could offer a near-term starting point for beneficial ownership reporting in ICCAT.

Additional considerations for beneficial ownership

3. Align port inspection beneficial ownership reporting with the PSMA (Recommendation 25-11). The port inspection report in Annex C of the FAO Agreement on Port State Measures (PSMA) already includes fields for vessel owners and for vessel beneficial owners, if known and different from the vessel owner. Updating Recommendation 25-11 to collect the same information in ICCAT port inspections would bring ICCAT in line with a standard many CPCs already apply as PSMA Parties.
4. Build toward beneficial ownership reporting on the Authorized Vessel List (Recommendation 25-12). Over the longer term, Global Fishing Watch encourages CPCs to consider requiring the name and address of beneficial owner(s) as a condition of listing on the ICCAT Authorized Vessel List, consistent with existing practice in CCAMLR and IOTC (CM 10-02 and Resolution 26/04, respectively).
5. Hold nationals who benefit from IUU fishing accountable (Recommendation 22-14 and Resolution 01-18). Recommendation 22-14 already requires CPCs to investigate natural or legal persons subject to their

jurisdiction that are responsible for, benefiting from or supporting IUU fishing, explicitly including beneficial owners, and to report on the actions taken. Global Fishing Watch encourages CPCs to share how they are implementing this obligation. CPCs may also wish to consider updating Resolution 01-18, which defines the scope of IUU fishing, to make clear that it extends to natural and legal persons subject to their jurisdiction, consistent with Rec. 22-14.

Recommendations

On beneficial ownership, as priority items, Global Fishing Watch encourages CPCs to:

- Add a dedicated beneficial owner field to the ICCAT IUU Vessel List, consistent with Recommendation 23-16.
- Amend Recommendation 24-15 so that flag States report the beneficial owners of vessels on the ICCAT Record of Carrier Vessels.

III. Support ICCAT data interoperability with the FAO Global Information Exchange System

As ICCAT and other RFMOs expand vessel identification, tracking and other reporting obligations, the risk of duplicative or inconsistent reporting burdens on CPCs is growing. FAO's GIES and the associated Global Record offer a global reference point for ICCAT to align its own reporting systems, which could help improve consistency and efficiency. Global Fishing Watch encourages CPCs to explore closer alignment between its own vessel data and the data structures used by GIES and the Global Record. This would allow CPCs to report vessel identification and ownership information once, with that information made available consistently across RFMOs and instruments.

IV. Conclusion and Recommendations

Vessel tracking transparency and beneficial ownership disclosure are mutually reinforcing pillars of effective, transparent fisheries management. We encourage CPCs to:

- Support adoption of a binding amendment to Recommendation 18-10 recognizing AIS as a complementary tool to VMS, and, if needed, direct intersessional work to resolve any outstanding technical questions.
- Advance beneficial ownership transparency as outlined above – beginning with the step of adding a dedicated beneficial owner field on the IUU Vessel List and requiring it for the Carrier Vessel List.
- Encourage harmonization of data interoperability between ICCAT's vessel data systems and GIES and the Global Record.

Global Fishing Watch is available to provide technical support, data analysis, and tools to assist CPCs and the Secretariat in advancing these measures.

References: (1) Galaz, V., Crona, B., Dauriach, A. et al. Tax havens and global environmental degradation. *Nat Ecol Evol* 2, 1352–1357 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41559-018-0497-3>

Contact

✉ brianna.elliott@globalfishingwatch.org

🌐 globalfishingwatch.org

🐦 [@globalfishingwatch.org](https://twitter.com/globalfishingwatch)

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Global Fishing Watch is an international nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing ocean governance through increased transparency of human activity at sea. By creating and publicly sharing map visualizations, data and analysis tools, we aim to enable scientific research and transform the way our ocean is managed. We believe human activity at sea should be public knowledge in order to safeguard the global ocean for the common good of all.