# WWF STATEMENT

NOVEMBER 2026

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# 25th Special Meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic tuna (ICCAT)

WWF is pleased to participate as an Observer to the 25th Special Meeting of the ICCAT Commission in Vilamoura, Portugal from 16-23 November 2026. Effective fisheries management is key to ensuring progress in tuna fisheries sustainability and the conservation of marine wildlife. WWF considers the following priorities as essential milestones for this year's meeting and calls on Contracting Parties and Cooperating non-Contracting Parties (CPCs) to work together cooperatively to find consensus and make progress on tuna and tuna-like fisheries sustainability in the Atlantic Ocean.

## Tropical tuna

Tropical tuna fisheries in the Atlantic face a range of challenges, from inadequate catch monitoring and reporting to weaknesses in management measures, particularly those related to Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs). The section below outlines the main issues and explores potential solutions.

Despite the last stock assessment conducted in 2024 indicating that **yellowfin tuna** in the Atlantic is not overfished and not subject to overfishing, catches in recent years have regularly exceed the Total Allowable Catch and TAC is set at 110,000 t for 2026.

Although the reported harvest for last year was slightly below the limit, in 2024 reported catches were above 140,000 t, well beyond the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) similarly to the previous 6 years. If not addressed effectively, overfishing is expected to lead to an overfished stock. Furthermore, the lack of catch allocations among Contracting Parties makes effective monitoring and control of the fishery extremely difficult. The Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS) recommended the Commission in 2025 to establish a mechanism to prevent that TAC is exceeded.

The last stock assessment (2022) of the East and West Atlantic stocks of skipjack indicated that the stock is not overfished and not subject to overfishing. However, catches of the Eastern stock exceeded the Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) in 2022, 2023 and 2025.

Although Recommendation 24-01 strengthened FAD management of ICCAT fisheries by introducing important requirements to mitigate the impact on the ecosystem, other measures to address monitoring still need adoption to improve Fishing Aggregating Devices (FAD) management. These are listed below.

### KEY ASKS

- WWF calls on CPCs to maintain the current catch limit (110,000 t) for the **yellowfin tuna** stock and to urgently adopt an allocation scheme for the fleets in the Atlantic, as well as mechanisms to address fleet overcapacity. This will ensure an effective monitoring system to prevent overfishing. WWF considers the adoption of an allocation scheme for tropical tuna a

fundamental pre-condition for any effective management measures for the long-term management of tuna stocks.

- WWF urges the Commission to adopt interim management measures to ensure the East Atlantic stock of **skipjack** is maintained at sustainable levels until the next stock assessment, which should be scheduled for 2027 to avoid any further delay.

- WWF recommends the Commission to revise Recommendation 24-01 to improve monitoring and management of **Fishing Aggregating Devices** (**FAD)**, including:

    - Adopting a timeline to develop a FAD register.
    - Requiring a near real-time FAD position and acoustic biomass data recording for scientific use.
    - Adopting a FAD marking scheme for FAD structure and buoys.
    - Adopting rules for FAD ownership and buoys activation and deactivation.

## South Atlantic albacore

The most recent stock assessment for albacore in the South Atlantic in 2026, described the stock as overfished and with a lower level of productivity comparing to the previous assessment. With the current management based on a TAC of 28,000 t expiring this year, WWF urges CPCs to adopt an interim scheme based on a TAC level that ensures a sustainable exploitation of this stock, until the adoption of a Management Procedure which is expected in 2027.

## Atlantic bluefin tuna

WWF recognizes the remarkable recovery of Atlantic bluefin tuna as a strong example of how science-based management, effective compliance measures, and international cooperation can successfully rebuild a depleted fish stock. The current management framework, including the Harvest Control Rule, robust monitoring, control and surveillance measures, comprehensive catch documentation, observer coverage, and quota management, has been instrumental in achieving this outcome and must be maintained as such and be of inspiration for the management of other ICCAT fisheries. WWF encourages the Commission to continue ensuring that any future management decisions are firmly grounded in scientific advice and do not compromise the long-term sustainability of the stock. Preserving the integrity of the current management system remains essential to safeguarding the gains achieved and securing a healthy Atlantic bluefin tuna population for future generations.

## Mediterranean Swordfish

The most recent stock assessment for **Mediterranean swordfish,** conducted in 2026, indicated that the stock is still overfished and the current fishing mortality is well above MSY (+11%). This is particularly concerning, especially considering its management is subject to a recovery plan that was adopted in 2016. Already in June 2020, the first stock assessment after the implementation of Recommendation 16-05, highlighted the worrying picture of significant gaps in catch reports, especially for juveniles that are caught below the minimum landing size and are likely largely discarded dead at sea, with very limited information returned to the system for effective management.

## KEY ASKS

- ✓ WWF urges the Commission to review **Recommendation 16-05** to ensure the plan delivers on its Mediterranean swordfish conservation objectives, which must ensure that overfishing is immediately ended to allow for the stock to move swiftly to the green zone of the Kobe plot.

- ✓ Fast track the adoption of a Mediterranean swordfish electronic Catch Documentation Scheme as a tool to improve **reporting and traceability** of the catch, as well as contrast illegal fishing and trade.

- ✓ Ensure full implementation of the ICCAT Recommendation 03-04 that prohibits the use of driftnets for fisheries targeting large pelagics in the Mediterranean. To this extent WWF encourages all CPCs to adopt the EU proposal of Recommendation PWG-437 that extends the driftnet ban to the whole ICCAT Convention area.

- ✓ Considering the initial evidence that suggests significant differences in catchability, selectivity, and bycatch rates of the **trapline gear** compared with traditional pelagic longline. To this end WWF emphasises the importance of all CPCs continuing the necessary efforts to expand the data collection of this type of gear to inform the Commission on trade-offs for additional technical and management measures for this stock.

## Sharks & rays

In 2026 the status of the North Atlantic **shortfin mako** stock was re-assessed, which factored in new biological data and information. The assessment concludes that in 2024 the stock was overfished, but not subject to overfishing and highlights important concerns and uncertainties that were not addressed throughout the stock assessment.
The adoption of Recommendation 21-09 establishing a rebuilding program for the endangered shortfin mako shark in the North Atlantic was a milestone towards stopping the decline of the stock, paving the way for its recovery. Although for 2025 retention was still not allowed, reported catches, landings and discards in the North Atlantic were still above 630 t. Furthermore, the estimated fishing mortality, including dead discards and post-release mortality, continues to far exceed the acceptable fishing mortality required to ensure the stock can rebuild, something already not forecasted to be achieved before 2070, given the vulnerable biological characteristics of this stock.

In 2026 the SCRS assessed the status of **blue shark** in the North and South Atlantic and advised that the current TAC for both stocks needs to be reduced significantly to ensure a high probability of maintaining the stocks in the green quadrant of the Kobe plot.
There is increasing evidence that the Mediterranean blue shark population should be treated as a separate management unit from the Atlantic population[1]. There is a concerning lack of data for this stock and no scientific assessment, despite the critical status of the species as per IUCN[2] and the negative Non-Detriment Finding for CITES by the EU for Mediterranean blue shark. We commend the decision of the SCRS to advance an assessment process of the impact of ICCAT fleets in the Mediterranean on the bycatch of megafauna, including endangered and protected species.

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[1] Dolfo, V., Boissin, E., Lapinski, M., & Planes, S. (2024). New insights into population structure, demographic history, and effective population size of the critically endangered blue shark Prionace glauca in the Mediterranean Sea. *PloS one*, *19*(6), e0305608.

[2] Biton-PorSmoguer, Sebastián, and Josep Lloret. "Potentially unsustainable fisheries of a critically-endangered pelagic shark species: The case of the Blue shark (Prionace glauca) in the Western Mediterranean Sea." *Cybium* 42.3 (2018): 299-302.

Sims, D., Fowler, S.L., Ferretti, F. & Stevens, J. 2016. *Prionace glauca (Mediterranean assessment)*. *The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species* 2016: e.T39381A16553182. Accessed on 29 October 2024.

## KEY ASKS

- ✓ **Maintain the current TAC at zero for shortfin mako sharks**. In addition, introduce measures aimed at reducing pelagic sharks' mortality due to interactions with the fishing gear. These measures should include interventions such as time and spatial restrictions, prohibiting wire leaders and shark lines to immediately reduce the mortality rate of pelagic sharks, and request the SCRS to advise on other catch mitigation techniques. This is of relevance to shortfin mako sharks for which current mortalities still exceed a level that would allow rebuilding the stock, noting also that the catches consist mostly of juveniles with a higher risk of at-haul and post-release mortality.

- ✓ WWF calls upon the Commission to maintain the **TAC for the North Atlantic stock of blue shark** at the current level (30,000 t in 2025), to maintain the stock in the green quadrant of the Kobe plot with acceptable confidence. To achieve this, WWF notes that with the current level of reported catches (19,390 t in 2025), the probability to achieve the management objectives by 2033 is near to 100%. WWF urges the Commission to invest time and resources in the development of a Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) process for this stock that will accelerate the adoption of an MSE-tested Management Procedure.

- ✓ WWF asks the Commission to reduce the **TAC for the South Atlantic stock of blue shark** (27,711 t in 2025). A TAC set at maximum of 25,000 t will ensure the management objectives can be met by 2033 with a probability higher than 70%. Noting also that the current (2025) reported yield is 23,251 t.

- ✓ WWF calls upon the Commission to urgently adopt management measures for **blue shark in the Mediterranean.** This should include a moratorium on the landings of blue shark catches until a stronger data collection, monitoring and research program is put in place and would ensure alignment with the recent listing on the Annex II of the SPA/BD protocol of the Barcelona Convention. To reduce mortality, WWF proposes to consider incentive mechanisms to compensate vessels that implement measures (e.g. change or adaptation of gear and fisheries strategy such as spatial temporal closures) to reduce blue shark bycatch mortality, through a more favourable access to sustainable fishing opportunities for other target species (e.g. bluefin tuna), and strongly supports a dedicated SCRS meeting for Mediterranean sharks in 2027, as well as the continuation of work on all bycatch species groups.

- ✓ For all shark species, WWF urges all CPCs, as a matter of priority, to adopt a **fins naturally attached policy** with no exceptions. WWF notes the excellent measures already undertaken by other RFMOs such as NAFO (2017), GFCM (2018) and partially IOTC (2018), and notes that ICCAT is lagging badly behind other RMFOs on this important issue.

- ✓ WWF also underlines the strategic role that ICCAT and other tuna RFMO can play for the implementation of the Agreement on Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (**BBNJ Agreement**) and, in line with the BBNJ Agreement's 'Enhanced Cooperation' text, encourages strengthened collaboration with other conventions and Regional Fisheries Management bodies, including in particular **CITES, CMS and GFCM,** and other relevant bodies.

- ✓ WWF urges parties to support the research to identify critical habitats, including mating and nursery areas, to inform spatial-temporal management measures both at national and regional levels.

## Fleet management and monitoring

The fishing fleet operating in the Atlantic Ocean is growing constantly. Overcapacity represents a major risk factor for the overexploitation of fish stocks, substantially contributing to high levels of bycatch mortality and undermining the economic benefits from fisheries.

Observer coverage and electronic monitoring is essential to ensure effective fishing management, compliance and reporting. The current minimum of 5% coverage for Atlantic longline vessels does not ensure effective monitoring and independent verification of these fishing operations at sea. It has been ten years since ICCAT Standing Committee on Research and Statistics deemed the current coverage of longline vessels insufficient and recommended an increase to at least 20%, to align with standards for reliably estimating bycatch of common species. The SCRS currently advises a further increase to a minimum of 50% for properly gauging incidental take of rare species, including several species of highly threatened seabirds and sharks.

**WWF joins the anti-IUU coalition to call for stronger transparency and anti-IUU measures.**
**(PWG-439)**

## KEY ASKS

✓ WWF calls upon the Commission to agree on a mechanism to **limit the capacity** of the fishing fleet operating in the Atlantic Ocean through the adoption of closed vessel registries to take effect in 2027 and harmonize the metrics to measure capacity of different fleets.

✓ As a first step, the Commission should require that all industrial tuna vessels, including supporting vessels and all those engaged in at-sea transshipments, are subject to 20% **observer coverage** (human and/or electronic) with the target to achieve 100% within a credible timeline for implementation.

✓ WWF urges all CPCs to fully implement Rec. 24-14 to **protect the health, safety and welfare of observers** in CPC observer programmes.

✓ WWF recommends the Commission to require the use of the **Automatic Identification System (AIS)** as a complementary tool to integrate and complement the Monitor and Control System of ICCAT fisheries.

WWF reaffirms its commitment to supporting the work of the Secretariat and CPCs and renews its offer to cooperate to facilitate meaningful progress in tuna conservation. We consider dialogue essential to advance on the adoption of science-based measures and ensure the long-term sustainability of tuna fisheries and the ecosystems that depend on them.


**For more information**

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