JOINT STATEMENT BY

Call for the ICCAT to support stronger transparency and anti-IUU measures November 2026

Oceana, The Pew Charitable Trusts and WWF are working together to ensure that the EU's engagement with Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) and key partners leads to strong transparency and measures against illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing worldwide.

In our comprehensive report titled "Achieving transparency and combating IUU fishing in RFMOs",[1] we outline the minimum transparency and anti-IUU fishing measures that we consider essential for RFMO and fishing entities to adopt and implement in order to end IUU fishing.

The 2025 ICCAT Commission meeting saw several recommendations adopted. In particular, we welcome the improvements introduced through the adoption of *Recommendations 25-11 on Port State Measures and 25-12 on the Record of Vessels 20 metres or greater, as well as those to streamline and strengthen the compliance process.*

In recent months, important progress on topics such as high seas boarding and inspection, catch documentation schemes, information exchange for the implementation of port state measures, electronic monitoring and beneficial ownership transparency have been taking place in working groups. We urge all ICCAT CPCs to use this year's Commission meeting to advance these discussions towards adoption.

To promote transparency and tackle IUU fishing, we ask ICCAT CPCs to prioritise the following actions:

- **Expand IMO number requirements to include all eligible vessels**

Recommendation 21-14, replacing Recommendation 13-13, introduced the obligation to include the IMO or LR number in the ICCAT record of fishing vessels, for all fishing vessels of 20 metres in length overall or greater authorised to fish in the Convention area, unless justified under paragraph 7. Further improvements were introduced with Recommendation 25-12 which replaced 21-14.

In addition, the *mutatis mutandis* clauses in Recommendations 16-05 and 18-02 extended the IMO number requirements established in the former Recommendation 13-13 (eventually replaced by Recommendation 25-11) to the vessel lists for swordfish, albacore and bluefin tuna operations. Thus, in addition to all fishing vessels of 20 metres or greater, vessels down to 12 metres that target bluefin tuna, albacore and swordfish and that are authorised to operate outside waters under national jurisdiction of the flag State, are required to obtain an IMO number.

Despite improvements in 2021 and 2025, ICCAT is still not aligned with the IMO criteria[2] and remains the only tuna RFMO that does not require IMO numbers for all motorised inboard fishing vessels,

[1] www.iuuwatch.eu/2019/06/new-report-achieving-transparency-and-combating-iuu-fishing-in-rfmos/

[2] International Maritime Organization Assembly Resolution A.1117(30) of December 2017, wwwcdn.imo.org/localresources/en/KnowledgeCentre/IndexofIMOResolutions/AssemblyDocuments/A.1117(30).pdf, also acknowledged by ICCAT's Compliance Committee in its 2018 annual report www.iccat.int/Documents/BienRep/REP_EN_18-19_I-1.pdf.

including wooden ones, down to a size limit of 12 metres authorised to operate outside waters under the national jurisdiction of the flag State.

We call on ICCAT CPCs to fully implement the IMO requirements for vessels targeting swordfish, albacore and bluefin tuna. We urge CPCs to amend Recommendation 25-12 to expand the application of IMO numbers to all eligible fishing vessels above 12 metres, in line with IMO Resolution A.1117(30) by adopting a work plan or timeline to this effect that includes specific milestones, for example, an interim expansion to 15 metres.

- **Agree on a High Seas Boarding Inspections scheme**

High seas boarding and inspection schemes within RFMOs are crucial for assessing compliance, combating illegal fishing and promoting responsible marine resource management. We support the creation of a dedicated Working Group to oversee the design and deployment for such a scheme - similar to those already established in various RFMOs including CCAMLR, NAFO, SIOFA and WCPFC.

The success of these schemes depends on participation of qualified inspectors onboard vessels capable of sailing into the high seas. Each member of the Commission should have the right to participate in the scheme by training and fielding qualified inspectors and by conducting patrols. In order to promote consistency, transparency and high equitable participation within the scheme, inspecting parties should, as a rule, be multinational in makeup. In addition, capacity building (including training and development of common operational procedures) must be made available.

We are pleased to note the fruitful discussions and progress achieved intersessionally in 2026, which also includes deliberations over a draft proposal.

We urge CPCs to continue this effort with the goal of adopting a high seas boarding and inspection scheme through a structured and inclusive dialogue at the 2026 Commission meeting.

We encourage CPCs to review our white paper on high seas boarding and inspection schemes which also includes an indicative step by step guide on how HSBI schemes work.

- **Expand the coverage of electronic Catch Documentation Schemes (eCDS) to cover all ICCAT stocks/species**

Well-designed CDS play a pivotal role in enhancing seafood traceability and verifying the legality of fish catches through complex international supply chains. Aligning CDS across all RFMOs is key to combat IUU fishing effectively and, as highlighted by the *ad hoc* CDS Working Group, ensuring interoperability and similar data standards. Clear guidance on the format, use, and key data elements to be included in e-CDS are detailed in a report titled "Aligning RFMO Catch Documentation Schemes",[3] and should inform the work of the CDS Working Group.

We are pleased to note past progress which includes the submission of a draft workplan outlining the recommendation for an expanded ICCAT CDS by the 2026 Commission meeting and the prioritisation of bigeye tuna and swordfish. However, we regret that the workplan deadline will be missed.

We call on all CPCs to endorse intersessional efforts, including the basic design characteristics, the proposed workplan and the two identified priority species, Bigeye and Swordfish and consider including Yellowfin tuna in the priority species list. Furthermore, we call CPCs to continue to actively

[3] www.iuuwatch.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/EU-IUU-Fishing-Coalition_Seafood-Traceability-Report_Dec-2021-1.pdf

participate in the CDS WG with a goal of implementing the proposed workplan by presenting at the 2027 IMM meeting a draft recommendation on an expanded CDS and adopting it at the 2027 Commission.

Supporting documents available include FAO's Voluntary Guidelines for Catch Documentation Schemes, FAO's Guide on Understanding and Implementing Catch Documentation Schemes, FAO's Guidance document on Advancing End-To-End Traceability and the EU IUU Fishing Coalition reports.[4]

- **Continue to make progress in developing an ICCAT-wide Electronic Monitoring Programme**

We welcome the continued discussions by the Electronic Monitoring Systems Working Group since the adoption of Recommendation 23-18.

We call on CPCs to implement Recommendation 23-18 by adopting the Programme Description and Programme Implementation reporting templates to harmonise CPC reporting on the EMS programmes. We encourage CPCs to

(1) prioritise the development of EMS definitions, as ICCAT is the only RFMO that does not include definitions in its EMS standards,

(2) create an audit and assurance programme to help ensure that domestic EMS programmes are meeting the adopted Standards and that data derived from EMS and used to satisfy Commission reporting requirements is consistent, accurate, and high quality, and

(3) continue to develop minimum standards for additional gear types, vessels and fishing operations. We also continue to encourage CPCs who are trialling electronic monitoring programmes on their vessels to use the adopted ICCAT standards and provide feedback on their use at future IMM meetings.

In addition, and noting that EM programmes are now being developed and implemented across ICCAT members, ICCAT should revise Recommendation 16-14 to increase observer coverage to 20% for pelagic longliners per the SCRS recommendation, and adopt a timeline to reach 100% coverage for the fleet. Such a measure will not only improve data reporting but also reduce the likelihood for IUU fishing through increased oversight.

- **Improve labour standards**

Labour standards in ICCAT fisheries are essential for safeguarding the rights and well-being of the often-vulnerable workers. Many fisheries are characterised by challenging working conditions, extended periods at sea, and exposure to dangerous elements. Ensuring humane working conditions, fair wages, and safe working practices are not only ethical imperatives but also essential for retaining a skilled and motivated workforce.

Incorporating core labour standards into ICCAT's framework and reporting requirements can also enhance transparency and value to ICCAT's fisheries. Ensuring that fish products are sourced from vessels adhering to high labour practices enables consumers and seafood markets to make more informed and sustainable choices.

[4] EU IUU Coalition. "Seafood Traceability: Aligning RFMO catch documentation schemes to combat IUU fishing" (2021). www.iuuwatch.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/EU-IUU-Fishing-Coalition_Seafood-Traceability-Report_Dec-2021-1.pdf

As such, we commend the work of the ad hoc Working Group on Labour Standards that culminated in the adoption of Resolution 23-20 on Core Principles on Labour Standards in ICCAT Fisheries.

We call on CPCs to consider further strengthening Resolution 23-20 by including access to internet services as part of the core working and living elements and upgrading the Resolution into a binding recommendation in the near future.

- **Advance beneficial ownership transparency**

ICCAT's monitoring and enforcement efforts can be further strengthened through enhanced transparency on vessel ownership. A major loophole in global fisheries governance is the ability of individuals profiting from IUU fishing to hide behind opaque corporate structures and flags of non-compliance. Without visibility into who ultimately controls fishing operations, enforcement disproportionately targets operators and crew, while the real beneficiaries are often not held to account.

We encourage ICCAT to explore a series of options for advancing beneficial ownership (BO) transparency, including initiating a discussion on definitions and harmonisation, BO data reporting and information sharing, better integration with the compliance process, and capacity building.

To support the discussion at ICCAT, together with Global Fishing Watch, we published a white paper on BO and recommended actions ICCAT can take.

- **Ban driftnets across the ICCAT Convention Area**

ICCAT has long recognised the impact of driftnets on its fisheries, from Resolution 96-15 on Large-Scale Pelagic Driftnets to the ban on using driftnets in large pelagic fisheries in the Mediterranean set out in paragraph 3 of Recommendation 03-04. More than two decades on, there is an opportunity to build on this commitment by giving the existing ban the clarity it needs to be implemented and enforced consistently by all CPCs.

Recent investigative work in the Alboran Sea shows vessels actively deploying driftnets and at least 843 vessels linked to driftnet activity across five ports in the region.[5] It also recorded bycatch of protected and vulnerable species such as dolphins, turtles and sharks. These findings demonstrate how having clear definitions and controls over driftnet can meaningfully support coastal and flag CPCs in their efforts to end this practice.

We call upon ICCAT to work towards adopting a measure that clearly defines driftnets and bans them for vessels targeting large pelagic species in all of ICCAT's Convention Area at the 2026 Commission meeting. Furthermore, we invite CPCs and the Compliance Committee to ensure the implementation of all measures related to driftnets through effective monitoring, control and surveillance, continued cooperation with the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM), and by providing targeted support to fishing communities as they transition to selective gears.

[5] Environmental Justice Foundation. "Walls of dead: Illegal driftnetting in the Mediterranean" (2024). https://ejfoundation.org/resources/downloads/Morocco-driftnets-report-2024.pdf