

29th Regular Meeting of the ICCAT Commission

WWF is pleased to participate as an Observer to the 29th Regular Meeting of the ICCAT Commission in Seville, Spain from 17-24 November 2025. 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 fisheries sustainability in the Atlantic Ocean.

Tropical tuna

Despite the stock assessment conducted in 2024 indicating that yellowfin tuna in the Atlantic is not overfished and not subject to overfishing, catches continue to regularly exceed the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) of 110,000 t set for 2024, with fleet overcapacity contributing to this outcome. The reported harvest in 2024 is above 140,000 t, well beyond the TAC similarly to the last 6 years. If not addressed effectively this level of catch is expected to result in overfishing and lead to an overfished status. The current catch limit is still not allocated to Contracting Parties, making the monitoring of the fisheries extremely ineffective.

The stock assessment conducted for bigeye tuna in 2025 showed an improved status of the stock with bigeye estimated to be not overfished and not subject to overfishing. The yield in 2024 (54,984 t) was below the TAC set for the same year (62,000 t). Recommendation 24-01 increased the TAC to 73,011 t.

The 2022 stock assessment of the East and West Atlantic stocks of skipjack showed a positive stock status, indicating the stock is not overfished and not subject to overfishing and confirming the same result of 2014. The Western stock was the first tropical tuna stock to complete the Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) process and is now suitable for an MSE-tested Management Procedure.

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 needs to be adopted to improve 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's overcapacity. This will ensure an effective monitoring system to prevent overfishing.
- ✓ WWF fully supports the adoption of a precautionary TAC for **bigeye tuna** that would maintain the stock status towards the green zone of the Kobe plot with a high probability through 2034. According to scientific advice, maintaining the current TAC of 73,011 t will allow this objective to be met with 91% probability.
- ✓ WWF urges the Commission to adopt this year a Management Procedure (MP) for the **Western Atlantic stock of skipjack**. This requires the 2026 TAC to be based on the MSE-tested MP and would pave the way to advance the **MSE multi-stock process for all tropical tunas**.

- ✓ WWF calls upon the Commission to require the development a **Regional Observer Program** for tropical tuna in the Atlantic, considering the need for harmonisation and coordination of different national programs.
- ✓ 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.

Atlantic bluefin tuna

WWF acknowledges the efforts of all CPCs and different stakeholders that made it possible to drastically change the fate of Atlantic bluefin tuna, driving the stock from the verge of collapse to a safe and stable status in a relatively short time. In 2022 the ICCAT Commission adopted a Management Procedure (MP) for both the western Atlantic and eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean management areas (Rec. 22-09). The last assessment describes the stock status as not overfished and not subject to overfishing, with the adopted MP expected to maintain both stocks in the green quadrant of the Kobe matrix with high probability over the next 30 years. The adopted MP was a significant improvement of the management framework, providing stability and consolidating the growing trend of biomass.

KEY ASKS

- ✓ WWF asks the Commission to carefully consider the two different management options indicated by the Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS) basing on the Management Procedure. These were to: 1) revise the TAC for the second management cycle (2026-2028), following the two scenarios (BR and BR*), and 2) maintain the commitment to review the MSE by 2028, including the new available scientific information.
- ✓ WWF wishes to draw the Commission's attention to the recurrent and increasing presence of bluefin tuna carcasses found at sea, particularly off the Balearic Islands. We urge the Commission to carefully consider this issue and in general take every effort to ensure full implementation of Rec. 24-05 and account for all other sources of hidden mortality that could hinder the assessment of the stocks.

Swordfish

The status of Atlantic swordfish was last assessed by the SCRS in 2022. While the North Atlantic stock was assessed to be not overfished and not subject to overfishing, and despite the catch advice being generated by a Management Procedure adopted in 2024, the Southern stock is still overfished and subject to overfishing. The reported catch in 2024 is about 9,264 t and did not exceed the enforced TAC that was set at 10,000 t until 2026, with a probability higher than 50% to end overfishing from this year.

The first stock assessment in June 2020, after the implementation of Recommendation 16-05 for a recovery plan for Mediterranean swordfish, highlighted the concerning picture of significant gaps in catch reports. This was especially the case for juveniles that are caught below the minimum

landing size and are largely discarded dead at sea with very limited information returned to the system for effective management. The expanded use of trapline gear, recently observed in the Mediterranean and in the Atlantic, presents both challenges and opportunities for future management of this stock and fishery.

KEY ASKS

- ✓ WWF calls upon the Commission to carefully monitor the **South Atlantic stock** to confirm rebuilding is progressing, considering that the probability to achieve the target by 2033 is relatively low (52%).
- ✓ WWF urges the Commission to mandate the SCRS to anticipate the **Mediterranean swordfish** stock assessment that was last evaluated in 2020, to monitor the effectiveness of the rebuilding plan.
- ✓ Considering the initial evidence that suggests significant differences in catchability, selectivity, and bycatch rates of the **trapline gear** compared with traditional pelagic longline, WWF would like to emphasise the importance of all CPCs taking the necessary steps to expand the data collection of this type of gear to allow the Commission to take the required management decisions for this fishery.
- ✓ **Reporting and traceability** should also be improved, as well as ensuring compliance with ICCAT Recommendation 03-04 that prohibits the use of driftnets for fisheries targeting large pelagics in the Mediterranean.

Sharks & rays

The adoption of Recommendation 21-09 establishing a comprehensive 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 2024 retention was still not allowed, reported catches, landings and discards in the North Atlantic were still above 900 t. Furthermore, the estimated fishing mortality, including dead discards and post-release mortalities, continues to far exceed the acceptable fishing mortality required to ensure the stock can rebuild, something already not forecast to be achieved before 2070, given the vulnerable biological characteristics of this stock.

In 2023 the SCRS assessed the status of blue shark in the North and South Atlantic and advised that the current TAC for both stocks need 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 population¹. There is a concerning lack of data for this stock and no scientific assessment, despite the critical status of the species as per IUCN² and the negative non-detrimental finding for CITES by the EU for Mediterranean blue shark.

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 of 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, shark lines and other catch mitigation techniques to immediately reduce the mortality rate of pelagic sharks. 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), to maintain the stock in the green quadrant of the Kobe plot with acceptable confidence. WWF notes that with this level of catches (24,564 t in 2024) there will be more than 90% probability to achieve the management objectives by 2033. 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). A TAC set at maximum 25,000 t will ensure the management objectives can be met with a probability higher than 60%. Noting also that the current (2024) reported yield is 25,003 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. To reduce mortality, WWF proposes 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).
- ✓ 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 RFMOs on this important issue.
- ✓ WWF recommends that the SCRS advises on prohibition of retentions and better data reporting of bycatch of additional species including **basking sharks** and **great white sharks** and management measures for frequent bycatch species such as **pelagic stingrays**.
- ✓ 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 encourages strengthened collaboration with other conventions and Regional Fisheries Management bodies, including in particular **CITES, CMS and GFCM**.
- ✓ 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 fisheries management, compliance and reporting. The current minimum of 10% coverage for Atlantic longline vessels does not ensure effective monitoring and independent verification of these fishing operations at sea. Major buyers (retailers and food service companies) are also concerned with the poor levels of observer coverage.

[WWF joins the anti-IUU coalition to call for stronger transparency and anti-IUU measures.](#)³

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 2026 and harmonize the metrics to measure capacity of different fleets.
- ✓ The Commission should require that all industrial tuna vessels, including supporting vessels and all those engaged in at-sea transshipments, are subject to 100% **observer coverage** (human and/or electronic) with 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

Alessandro Buzzi

WWF Global Tuna Lead
abuzzi@wwfmedpo.org

Robin Davies

WWF Sustainable Fisheries Lead
robin.davies@wwf.ch



Working to sustain the natural world for the benefit of people and wildlife.

together possible.

panda.org

WWF® and ©1986 Panda Symbol are owned by WWF. All rights reserved.
WWF, 28 rue Mauverney, 1196 Gland, Switzerland. Tel. +41 22 364 9111
CH-550.0.128.920-7

³ [PWG 429 ENG 20251105171132.pdf](#) – Published on the ICCAT meeting repository