

JOINT STATEMENT BY



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

November 2025

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.

During the 2024 ICCAT annual meeting, several commendable recommendations were adopted on monitoring, control and surveillance. In particular, we welcome the adoption of *Recommendations 24-15 on Transshipment* and *24-14 on Protecting the Health and Safety of Observers in CPC Observer Programmes*.

In recent months, important discussions on topics such as catch documentation schemes, port state measures, electronic monitoring systems, high seas bordering and inspection and beneficial ownership transparency have been taking place in working groups. We urge all ICCAT CPCs to continue to actively participate in these discussions towards their prompt conclusions.

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

- **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](#)",² and should inform the work of the CDS Working Group.

We are pleased to note the progress made intersessionally which includes the submission of a draft work plan outlining the recommendation for an expanded ICCAT CDS by the 2026 Commission meeting and the prioritisation of bigeye tuna and swordfish.

We call on all CPCs to endorse intersessional efforts, including the basic design characteristics, the proposed work plan 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 participate in the CDS WG with a goal of implementing the proposed work plan by drafting and

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

² www.iuuwatch.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/EU-IUU-Fishing-Coalition_Seafood-Traceability-Report_Dec-2021-1.pdf

adopting a recommendation on an expanded CDS by the 2026 Commission meeting and commencing implementation from 2027.

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.³

- **Revise Recommendation 23-17 on port State measures to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing**

Adopting effective port State measures minimises the risk of illegally caught fish entering international markets. The FAO Agreement on Port State Measures (PSMA) is the first and only legally-binding, international agreement specifically designed to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing. As such, closer alignment of ICCAT's port State measures with the PSMA will minimise the risk of IUU-caught ICCAT-managed species from reaching the market and will help harmonise PSMs across all regional fisheries management bodies.

We welcome the UK's discussion paper and proposal on Strengthening ICCAT's Port State Measures and call on CPCs to amend Recommendation 23-17 to better align it with the FAO PSMA. Furthermore, to improve the collection and exchange of information among the national agencies involved and the implementation of port State measures, we recommend the development of an ICCAT-managed electronic information exchange system or CPCs could opt to use the FAO's Global Information Exchange System (GIES) as their own regional system that can then be connected with GIES' global interface to guarantee real time data and facilitate risk assessments in port.

- **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, and (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. 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.

- **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. Such schemes already exist in various RFMOs including CCAMLR, NAFO, SIOFA and WCPFC.

³ 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

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 urge CPCs to continue their deliberations with the goal of adopting a high seas boarding and inspection scheme through a structured and inclusive dialogue. In the absence of a dedicated working group, this could be achieved by allocating sufficient time for a dedicated discussion under an existing working group (e.g. the IMM, as agreed at the June 2025 meeting) in order to oversee the design and deployment of such a scheme, including the development of capacity building initiatives and the draft proposal for adoption at the 2026 annual 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.

- **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.

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.

- **Further 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.

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 (replaced by Recommendation 21-14) 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.

Although Recommendation 21-14 was a step in the right direction, ICCAT is still not aligned with the IMO criteria⁴ and remains the only tuna RFMO that does not require IMO numbers for all motorised inboard fishing vessels, 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 begin deliberations in expanding 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.

- **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.

⁴ International Maritime Organization Assembly Resolution A.1117(30) of December 2017, [wwwcdn.imo.org/localresources/en/KnowledgeCentre/IndexofIMOResolutions/AssemblyDocuments/A.1117\(30\).pdf](http://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.