

**REPORT OF THE INTERSESSIONAL MEETING OF PANEL 2**  
(Online, 2-5 March 2021)

**1. Opening of the Meeting**

The meeting was opened by the Chair of Panel 2, Mr. Shingo Ota (Japan).

**2. Appointment of Rapporteur**

The Secretariat agreed to serve as Rapporteur for the meeting.

Alberto Thais Parrilla Moruno from the Secretariat was appointed as rapporteur for the first part of the meeting. Nathan Taylor was appointed for the second part.

**3. Adoption of Agenda and meeting arrangements**

The Panel reviewed the draft Agenda, which was adopted and is attached as **Appendix 1**.

Japan requested that two Japanese companies be allowed to make the presentations under Item 7a) of the Agenda on growth ratios and the use of the latest technologies for this purpose. This request was approved.

The Executive Secretary explained the meeting arrangements and introduced the participating delegations. **Appendix 2** lists the delegates from each participating CPC, and observers.

The Assistant Executive Secretary gave a brief introduction about the operational aspects of the meeting. The meeting times and some minimum operational rules for Zoom were indicated.

The United States of America (USA) requested clarification on the process for adoption of the report and the Chair confirmed that the report will be approved by correspondence.

**4. Consideration of fishing, capacity, inspection and farming plans for 2021 presented by CPCs**

The Chair recalled that questions and comments on the fishing, capacity inspection and farming plans had been submitted in advance by the European Union (EU), Japan, Korea, Norway and the USA. The questions, together with the responses which had been received by the start of the meeting, were compiled and contained, together with additional questions and responses received during the meeting in **Appendix 3**.

The Chair of Panel 2 stated that the operation of the meeting would be different from normal. The questions and responses were provided before the meeting and all the plans presented were revised versions, with the aim of addressing the majority of the issues raised. The Chair expected to review all the plans on the first day, and the revised plans, based on the discussions of the first day, would be submitted for approval by the end of the second session on 3 March 2021. If plans were not approved in this meeting, they would be subject to approval through correspondence.

The Chair of Panel 2 suggested that the plans be reviewed in alphabetical order as usual.

***Albania***

Questions on the Albanian fishing plan had been submitted by the EU and Japan. Albania had submitted a revised plan, and response to the questions raised. No further clarification from Albania was requested.

Albania indicated that its plan was very similar to last year's. References to obsolete Recommendations had been changed. 1 t was set aside for bycatch, and this quantity was allocated to purse seiners or vessels targeting small pelagic species in the Adriatic Sea.

It was indicated that the plan continued to refer to Rec. 18-02. Since the other CPCs did not raise any other questions about the plan, Albania was asked to submit the plan with this correction.

Albania submitted a revised plan updating the Rec. 18-02 references to Rec. 19-04.

### ***Algeria***

Questions on the Algerian fishing plan had been submitted by the EU, Japan and the USA. Algeria had submitted a revised plan, and response to the questions raised. More information was requested by the EU about the increase in the number of purse seiners by some CPCs (>20% ceiling) and Japan about the figure in the Algerian bycatch quota.

Algeria indicated that its plan included the changes suggested in the questions received from other CPCs. It was confirmed that the quota and capacity figures contained an error; the correct figure for bycatch is 5 t, not 0.5 t. As regards the question raised by the USA, Algeria indicated that there would be 100% national observer coverage in the BFT fishing campaign, in addition to regional observers. As regards the question raised by the EU, Algeria confirmed that it was planning to increase its fleet in accordance with Rec. 19-04, paras 18 and 22a, as a developing State. Due to adverse weather conditions, Algeria had to request an extension of the fishing season last year so as to approach its established quota. For this reason, Algeria was planning to increase its fishing capacity.

The EU expressed a general concern about the increase in fleet indicated in the plans of several CPCs, despite the limits established in Rec. 19-04. The EU signalled that this increase, afforded by the Recommendation to developing States, would apply only if the CPC concerned can show that it effectively needs to do so to reach its quota. In this context, the EU asked Algeria if it reached its quota in 2020 with its existing fleet.

Algeria indicated that in 2020 it consumed 1,648 t of its allocated quota of 1,655 t, including bycatch. This quantity was reached after requesting a 10-day extension. In accordance with Rec. 19-04 para. 22a), and on the basis of these data, Algeria provided its rationale for the proposed increase in its fleet, noting further that the paragraph does not refer to percentages of used quota to justify the increase. In addition, Algeria explained that bluefin tuna is only targeted by tuna purse seine vessels.

The EU indicated that Algeria almost consumed its entire quota, yet proposed to add four more tuna purse seiners. Algeria should reconsider the number of vessels that it plans to add and that a lower number of purse seiners, 27 for example, would be a more appropriate number.

The USA expressed support for the EU's intervention noting that capacity must be commensurate with fishing possibilities. Future plans should include greater detail on how CPCs are adhering to paras 20 and 22 of Rec. 19-04.

Algeria agreed to reduce the number of vessels initially included in its plan from 30 to 28 and modified its plan accordingly.

The EU accepted this modification but reminded the Panel that the number of vessels indicated in the fishing plans does not constitute a 'historical right' and that those numbers shall be reviewed once the SCRS updates the catch rates.

### ***China***

Questions on the Chinese fishing plan had been submitted by the EU, Japan and the USA. China had submitted a revised plan, and response to the questions raised. No further clarification from China was requested by the EU and Japan. The USA asked for more detail about the designated port of Dakar. China answered this follow-up question.

China indicated that this year's plan would be the same as last year's. It included all the information requested and the corrections required through the comments of the different CPCs: Dakar as the designated port and establishment of 1 t for bycatch and/or discards, given that last year no bycatch was taken.

The USA asked China to confirm that they are landing bluefin tuna only in the designated port of Dakar, and that no transshipment in port or at sea is occurring. China clarified that it intended to land bluefin tuna only in Dakar, and to comply with Senegal's legislation, as a Contracting Party. China confirmed that no transshipment of eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean bluefin tuna will occur in port or at sea.

In response to a question on where fish would go after landing if no in-port transshipment would take place, China stated that fish would be transferred from fishing vessels to containers, which is not categorized as in-port transshipment, and then delivered to China for consumption.

China submitted a revised plan to more specifically address the issue of transshipment and to establish Dakar as the designated port for landing. This version also corrected the quota figures for China as the Chair suggested: 102 t as the initial quota and 101 t as the adjusted quota after assigning 1 t for bycatch purposes.

### ***Egypt***

Questions on the Egyptian fishing plan had been submitted by the EU and Japan. Egypt submitted a revised plan, but some concerns remained.

Egypt indicated that its allocated quota and that the purse seiners in the Mediterranean would be controlled by the competent authorities which would distribute licenses and report these vessels to the Secretariat. The references to obsolete recommendations had been corrected. Egypt reported that it had never experienced bycatch and that any catch would be controlled by fishery inspectors.

Egypt submitted a revised version with the corrections suggested by the Chair regarding transfer of fish to farms, which must be monitored: "shall" instead of "should" in page 1, "Decree Number (828) for the year 2011" paragraph.

### ***European Union***

Questions on the European Union's fishing plan had been submitted by Japan, Korea and the USA. The EU had submitted a revised plan, and response to the questions raised. No further clarification from the EU was requested by Korea. Japan requested more information about transposition of Rec.19-04 into EU regulation, to which the EU responded in writing.

The EU commented that its plan is very similar to last year's, and it welcomed the comments from the various Contracting Parties. The plan would set out the total number of vessels, available quota, as well as the quota for bycatch. The reserve would be larger this year to accommodate any unforeseen circumstance. Observers would follow all the related provisions established in Rec. 19-04 para 83. Tagging for research would continue in accordance with the recommendation. Farming on active farms with the relevant controls would be maintained. Participation in the joint inspection programme would be maintained. The EU also indicated its intention to carryover some of its unused quota from 2020.

The USA requested more details on the sectorial quota: fleet, gears and additional regulations to control these segments of the fleet. The EU indicated that it was complex due to the nature of these fisheries in Member States. The USA requested that the EU's 2022 fishing plan include more details on this aspect.

The EU undertook to provide the most detailed information possible for next year and submitted an updated plan incorporating the Chair's comments on the capacity table.

The Chair signalled that in light of the quota transfer from the EU to the UK (48.40 t), this amount should be deducted from the EU allocation. The EU confirmed that the transfer was being subject to its internal process and that it would submit a revised plan reflecting the reduction once the process would be finished (see Item 5 for further details).

The EU submitted a revised version including the changes related to its capacity table and made some corrections to figures regarding its Member States' vessels.

### ***Iceland***

Questions on the fishing plan from Iceland had been submitted by the EU, Japan and the USA. Iceland had submitted a revised plan, and response to the questions raised. No further clarification from Iceland was requested by these CPCs.

Iceland presented the information contained in its plan. Iceland reported that there would only be two longliners fishing for bluefin tuna; the regional observers plan would not therefore be applicable. Iceland considered that the capacity plans would be improved through addition of a line to indicate bycatch quota. The bycatch in the table clearly showed how variable it can be, between 0 and 10 t. Iceland would have sufficient control to ensure that its allocated quota would not be exceeded.

### ***Japan***

Questions on the fishing plan from Japan had been submitted by the EU and the USA. Japan had submitted a revised plan, and response to the questions raised. No further clarification from Japan was requested.

Japan confirmed that its plan was almost identical to last year's. It is a provisional plan given that Japan's campaign would start in August. Japan would submit a revised plan including the list of vessels with individual quotas before the start of the campaign.

Japan also confirmed that it expected to see improvement in the COVID-19 situation before August 1 so that Japan can place observers on board its longliners, but at the same time would start considering establishment of a contingency plan in case this is not possible. As regards tags, it was not possible to deliver additional plastic national tags due to the pandemic in the 2020 fishing season, but for the 2021 fishing season, a sufficient number of official tags would be delivered in advance to avoid a similar situation.

### ***Korea***

Questions on the fishing plan from Korea had been submitted by the EU and the USA. Korea had submitted a revised plan, and response to the questions raised. No further clarification from Korea was requested.

Korea presented its plan which was very similar to last year's. The changes concerned the intention to carry over unused quota from last year. Given that the fishing industry has 3 subsectors in the Atlantic Ocean and that the fishing ground for BFT is far away from others, the probability of bycatch occurring would be minimal.

Korea confirmed that Cape Town, Dakar and Cabo Verde would be used for in-port transshipment among the designated ports.

An updated plan was submitted to include the clarifications requested by the Chair regarding transshipments and designated ports.

### ***Libya***

Questions on the fishing plan from Libya had been submitted by the EU and Japan. Libya had submitted a revised plan, and response to the questions raised. No further clarification from Libya was requested.

Libya reported that this year's plan was virtually identical to last year's. The only changes were that a different decree is cited with respect to last year's plan and the inclusion of all ICCAT recommendations related to bluefin tuna.

Libya submitted a revised plan reflecting these changes.

### ***Morocco***

Questions on the fishing plan from Morocco had been submitted by the EU, Japan, Norway and the USA. Morocco had submitted a revised plan, and responses to the questions raised.

Morocco confirmed that this year's plan was very similar to last year's. Morocco noted a carry-over of the unused quota from 2020 to this year, and a quota would be established for all types of bycatch.

The Chair pointed out that Morocco first had to request such carry over, which would have to be approved by Panel 2 and proposed that the wording of this sentence in Morocco's plan be modified.

The EU asked Morocco how it would carry out random controls on farms. Morocco explained that the last version of the plan submitted explained the procedure comprising different steps to carry out these controls: control of traceability records introduced and control by transfer operation. A transfer controlled by camera for this monitoring will be done for 5% of fish, given that intra-farm transfers performed by the operator are taken into account in the risk analysis, since, from an operational perspective, the operator may require intra-farm transfers and that all these transfers are controlled by conventional camera and monitored by the authority.

Morocco submitted an amended plan which included clarification regarding the request for carryover of underage.

The USA commented that the capacity table of Morocco was submitted using an old version. The Chair did not consider it a major issue as the figure for under/overcapacity was correct, but informed the meeting that the Secretariat and he were discussing a better format with more detailed instruction for CPCs to fill out.

### **Norway**

The Panel noted that the plan submitted by Norway was accompanied by a document, entitled *Live storage of Atlantic Bluefin Tuna in Norway: initial trials*.

Questions on the fishing plan from Norway had been submitted by the EU and Japan. Norway had submitted a revised plan, and response to the questions raised.

Norway explained that its capacity management plan was very similar to last year's. If its request was approved to carry over a portion of the unused quota from 2020 to 2021, it would be used for research. In 2020 regional observers were not allowed to embark due to the pandemic, but Norway collaborated closely with the Programme. In 2021, Norway intends to embark regional observers, but this would depend on the progression of the pandemic.

Norway also submitted two SCRS papers<sup>1</sup>; *Fishing Capacity on Atlantic Bluefin Tuna by Purse Seine Vessels Fishing in the Norwegian EEZ from 2014 To 2019* (SCRS/2020/017) and, for information, *Live Storage of Atlantic Bluefin Tuna in Norway: Initial Trials*, to be presented in 2021.

Norway asked if any information on catch rates had been submitted by other CPCs and suggested that it be a priority for all CPCs.

The Chair noted that as regards catch rates and revision by the SCRS, there was no definitive document yet, but that this was an issue of concern for several CPCs since many figures were outdated and did not reflect the real data. The Chair proposed to discuss this following the endorsement of the plans. As regards the plan, the Chair informed Norway that several figures should be changed if the carry-over was approved.

Norway submitted a new plan which included a correction made by the Chair referring to the amount allocated for the purpose of tag and release, 4 t instead of 1t, and updated the research amount .

### **Syria**

Questions on the fishing plan from Syria had been submitted by the EU and the USA. Syria had submitted a revised plan, and response to the questions raised. No further clarification from Syria was requested.

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<sup>1</sup> Not attached; SCRS documents are published in the *Collective Volume of Scientific Papers*.

Although Syria was not present at the meeting, the Chair proposed to discuss its fishing plan. The issues raised were addressed and there were no comments on the updated plan.

### ***Tunisia***

Questions on the fishing plan from Tunisia had been submitted by the EU, Japan and the USA. Tunisia had submitted a revised plan, and response to the questions raised. The EU requested more information about the increase in the number of purse seiners by some CPCs (>20% ceiling).

Tunisia indicated that its fishing plan was practically identical to last year's. A revised version reflected the comments of the different CPCs. In addition, Tunisia requested that the underage from last year be carried over to 2021, most of which will be for purse seiners. The capacity table had been corrected in line with the comments received, as well as the bycatch, as requested by Norway. Tunisia would maintain the same number of purse seiners as last year.

In response to suggestions from the Chair and the USA, Tunisia submitted a revised version of its plan including the bycatch in its quota calculations: An initial quota of 2,655 t + a carry-over of 21.55 t gives a total quota of 2,676.55 t, out of which 26.55 t would be subtracted as bycatch. Therefore, the adjusted quota to be distributed among the Tunisian vessels would be 2,650 t.

These figures and calculations were included in the plan and the detailed footnote in the capacity table.

### ***Turkey***

Questions on the fishing plan from Turkey had been submitted by the EU and Japan. Turkey had submitted a revised plan, and response to the questions raised. The EU requested more information about the increase in the number of purse seiners by some CPCs (>20% ceiling).

Turkey introduced its plan with quota details and fleet. They had received a number of corrections to the capacity table.

As in the case of Algeria, the EU noted the increase in vessels dedicated to bluefin tuna fishing contained in Turkey's plan for 2021 and requested details for assessment of this request to increase from 27 vessels in 2020 to 36 in 2021.

Turkey replied that last year 36 vessels were initially included in its fishing plan, but then 27 vessels were authorised. Given that the quota was maintained, the same approach would be used. In addition, Turkey believed that this increase in capacity would be consistent with Rec. 19-04 para 20-22, which requires CPCs to calculate the capacity based on the catch rates.

As in the case of Algeria, the EU asked whether Turkey had consumed its full quota for 2020 as the EU needed to know the reason for increasing the number of vessels.

Turkey reported a consumption of 2,250 t against a total allocated quota of 2305 t. Turkey informed the Panel that it did not have a specific fleet for bluefin tuna, which is why an approximate number of vessels would be initially established (a maximum of 36 in this case) which would eventually be reduced when the definitive list (e.g. 27 last year) would be drawn up.

Subsequently, Turkey submitted a revised plan changing the number of purse seiners and a statement for the record that:

*Turkey has indicated in its revised fishing capacity plan a maximum of 33 fishing vessels (i.e. 29 purse seiners over 40 m and 4 purse seiners between 24 m and 40 m) as the ceiling for BFT Catching Vessels that could be authorized in 2021. Notwithstanding, Turkey does not expect to authorize more than 30 vessels considering the past practices, in accordance with domestic procedures.*

The EU accepted this explanation, but again affirmed its wish that the number of vessels indicated in the fishing plans be reviewed once the SCRS updates the catch rates.

### ***United Kingdom***

Questions on the fishing plan from the UK had been submitted by the EU and the USA. The UK had submitted a revised plan, and response to the questions raised.

The Chair explained that the UK had for the first time submitted its fishing plan for BFT as a result of Brexit and drew the attention of members to two circulars that had been sent detailing the quota transfers between the EU and the UK based on the trade and cooperation agreement between these two Contracting Parties.

The UK confirmed that it would receive 0.25% of the EU quota share and that it was a private agreement between two Parties which would not impact the TAC or the other Contracting Parties on the understanding that there was a need to formalise these changes to shares in line with ICCAT procedures at the annual Commission meeting.

The plan included amounts which would be set aside for bycatch and a scientific recreational “catch and release tag” (“CHART”) programme. There would not be a directed commercial fishery. The electronic tagging activities would be maintained.

The EU asked the UK about the CHART programme and whether it would be conducted in accordance with Rec. 19-04 para 45.

The UK confirmed that this programme would come under that paragraph and indicated it would provide details in its revised plan. In addition, the UK confirmed that all dead specimens during the activity of this programme would be counted against the UK quota.

The UK submitted a revised plan based on the discussion.

### ***Chinese Taipei***

Chinese Taipei noted that although Chinese Taipei had submitted a fishing plan, it would continue to prohibit its vessels from fishing eastern bluefin tuna in 2021. Chinese Taipei would report any bycatch taken by their vessels.

## **5. Determination of actions to be taken with respect to the plans under item 4**

The Panel endorsed all the plans presented under Item 4 during the meeting. The endorsed plans are included in **Appendix 4**.

The EU reported that following the communication to ICCAT of the quota transfer for bluefin tuna resulting from the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement, the EU was in the process of implementing this transfer into EU legislation, including notably how it would be financed. This internal process was expected to be completed in the near future and an updated fishing plan would be sent to ICCAT as soon as completed.

The EU also reiterated its concerns regarding possible overfishing with the increasing number of vessels and the need to revise the best estimated catch rates, noting that the number of vessels in the future may need to decrease if these rates change significantly. Their statement is attached in **Appendix 5**.

The rapporteur for the SCRS EBFT Working Group presented an updated EBFT catch rate analysis. He provided a brief history of the procedure to estimate catch rates and of the current opportunity to obtain estimates of catch per unit of effort. This involved integrating the nominal catch per unit effort by vessel that is available from the Secretariat’s data sources; defining a time-series for a core fleet selected from those vessels that had consistent operations and catch of EBFT; as well as linking with VMS and eBCD data. The presentation noted the importance of characterizing Joint Fishing Operations, that in recent years each fishing operation tended to be conducted by only one vessel out of several vessels participating in the joint fishing operation. This analysis would be presented to the BFT Species Group and at the plenary of the SCRS in 2021.

Panel 2 discussed the presentation and requested some clarifications. It was clarified that the core-fleet analysis would be for all vessels, including those operating outside the Mediterranean. In addition, VMS only applies to vessels greater than 15 m, meaning that there were no data for vessels below this length, but most of the catches came from larger vessels. It was also clarified that the new analysis would be done on a vessel-by-vessel basis which had the advantage of removing those vessels that are not actively fishing that may have been included in the 2009 analysis which was conducted based on aggregated data.

It was pointed out that an additional benefit of using eBCD and the VMS data in this way would be that it could properly account for the number of vessels that are actively fishing (typically one) in Joint Fishing Operations. The EU stated that it would be useful to compare the 2009 and the new methodology for continuity and comparison purposes. Panel 2 also expressed concern that the new method would likely have the chance to inflate catch-rate estimates given that non-active fishing vessels were removed. Norway noted that the existing (2009) catch rates were no longer fit for purpose. They emphasized the importance of developing a valid catch rate methodology.

Reports to the SCRS from CPCs are still needed for this catch rate analysis using their own detailed catch data. The Chair noted the importance that CPCs carry out their own analysis of catch rates for EBFT, as had been presented by Norway, because they would have access to better and more detailed information. To conclude, it was noted that the expected output of average catch rates by vessel type and gear type, should be used with caution when converted to fishing capacity as other factors need to be considered.

The Secretariat presented the new version of the CP47 form, attached in **Appendix 6**, which includes modifications such as: A new entry for designated ports, and adjustment of fishing capacity, and new footnotes for quotas, bycatch, etc. The Chair commented that the changes made in the capacity table structure as well as addition of footnotes were meant to make it easier for the CPCs to complete it. These changes are provisional and subject to any amendment in the appropriate recommendation.

## **6. Clarification requested by the ROP consortium regarding Rec. 19-04**

On the basis of the responses received from Algeria, the EU, the USA, and Turkey, the Chair of Panel 2 had prepared a consolidated document attached in **Appendix 7** containing a draft response to the consortium which had been circulated in advance of the meeting.

The document provided a set of topics, the requested clarifications and suggested responses to each topic. The meeting discussed each topic one by one.

**Inter-farm transfers:** The Chair confirmed the necessity of changing the form in the Rec. 19-04 Annex 4 for covering all the required records of the inter-farm transfers in a single document. Morocco noted that Rec. 19-04 does not consider adequately this type of transfers because it does not define an ITD for inter-farm transfer and in reality these transfers are composed of two different operations: a transfer between the donor farm and the transport cage and caging from the transport cage to the recipient farm as between farms, reported in an ITD and an ICD, respectively.

The Chair noted that Rec. 19-04 para 3h) needs to be modified to define in a more detailed way a “transfer”, including the whole process of an inter-farm transfer.

The Chair noted that a short-term solution was needed, and proposed that for the 2021 fishing season, the observers would use the current form including a note regarding this situation. The EU supported this as an interim step until Rec. 19-04 is amended.

**Voluntary control / control transfers:** There were no comments for the three first items related this topic. However, Algeria requested more information about the fourth and when the observer should issue a PNC. After some discussion, the Chair suggested a modification to the response for this item.

Three CPCs (the EU, the USA and Morocco) submitted comments regarding this topic, but discrepancies remained. As no consensus was received on this issue after an extensive discussion, the Chair requested the CPCs to submit their comments about this issue for further discussion by the end of the following week.



**Caging operations / natural mortalities:** The USA noted that the observer may need some additional documentation or supporting data, during the period of time when they are not present, in order to correctly carry out their duties. In this way their observation and analysis would be more precise and reliable. Currently there is no obligation to make the eBCDs available to ROP observers, but CPCs should provide such data if needed for the observer to fulfill their responsibilities. The Chair suggested modifying the suggested responses for these two topics and requested the CPCs to submit their comments about this issue for further discussion.

Two CPCs (the EU and the USA) submitted comments regarding the second issue of this topic, but full agreement could not be reached.

The USA submitted comments regarding the third issue of this topic.

**ROP programme:** There were no comments on this topic.

**Logbook requirements:** The EU supported the proposed response written by the Chair although there was a slightly different point of view on the definition of a JFO.

**Farm releases:** There were no comments on this topic.

Following the review of the revised topics, the Panel did not achieve an agreement about the comments received on each topic from the different CPCs. The Chair suggested to postpone any decision on this issue and define a final response by correspondence. The EU, the USA and Algeria supported this procedure.

The Chair asked the CPCs to send their comments and suggestions about the three pending topics to the Secretariat by 12 of March 2021. The Chair would see if he could produce consensus responses to the ROP consortium based on those comments and if not possible, they would be forwarded to the ROP consortium so they can evaluate the most accurate responses to their necessities.

The consortium appreciated the interest of the Panel in finalizing the pending clarifications as these topics could bring some issues within the upcoming bluefin tuna campaign.

The Chair confirmed that the rest of topics discussed were closed and their suggested responses to the consortium approved excepting if some CPC would be willing to send any further comment.

## **7. Matters related to the SCRS**

### **7.1 *Growth rates for farmed bluefin tuna***

In accordance with the procedures which had been agreed by the Commission, the Chair of Panel 2 had circulated a document for comment prior to the meeting attached in **Appendix 8**. No objections were raised to the responses suggested therein.

A Summary of SCRS work in relation to updating the growth table for the fattening period was presented by the Coordinator of the GBYP. The work consisted of three complementary approaches: determining the growth of individual fish using tagging, monitoring of selected cages, and comparing estimated weights at caging to weights at harvesting using electronic Bluefin Tuna Catch Documents (eBCD). The GBYP Coordinator showed some of the preliminary results of these studies. In addition, the GBYP Coordinator highlighted some potential future research steps including the use of acoustic tags and hydrophones placed in cages for determining individual growth trajectories of any tagged fish. Finally, the GBYP Coordinator provided a more global overview of the program's plans to develop a database system for integrating stereoscopic camera, harvesting, eBCD, ROP and VMS data that would allow for a more integrated analysis of this information.

The Panel discussed the presentation. The EU expressed thanks to the GBYP Coordinator and to the CPCs involved in this study. They noted the importance of having confidence in the analysis. One aspect that was of concern to them was that there is the potential for bias to be included in the study aiming to quantify growth by taking into account the difference between the weight at caging, derived from the length at first

measurement given by stereoscopic cameras, and the weight at harvest time. The EU recalled the background to the request to update the growth rates and the fact that some unusually high growth rates could not be explained, and that this led to suspicions by both importing and farming CPCs that illegal activities took place between caging and harvesting. Looking at the difference in weight between caging and harvesting would therefore likely result in including any bias potentially related to such activities and would not provide an accurate representation of what should be the maximum growth rates. The EU added that it is therefore important that the SCRS takes this into account before using this study to produce the updated maximum growth rates. Tunisia inquired how the stress could limit growth and affect natural mortality and how these effects would be accounted for in any analysis. In response, the GBYP Coordinator noted that in all these studies environmental parameters including food supply (and other factors) were recorded so that the influence of such parameters was considered in the estimation of growth. With respect to stress-induced mortality, he noted that this was outside the scope of the original focus of this project but that he hoped that the information to answer this question would be available from the growth study. He also noted that a substantial impediment to expanding studies on stress induced mortality was compensation for farmers for lost fish in the event that tagging caused such mortality. The USA inquired that if length at transfer was to be used to measure growth, then how would the existing length-weight relationship, based on wild fish be used? In response, the GBYP Coordinator noted that determining and using a suitable length-weight relationship was a part of the research plan. The USA expressed its view that, for purposes of the request made by Panel 2, the length-weight relationship developed for wild fish was the most appropriate one for use by the SCRS. Morocco noted that the apparent growth rates in Portuguese trap reached 80%; they requested this number be confirmed and requested the sample size used to determine this rate. In response he noted that the 80% growth corresponded to real data for a single fish but that there was considerable variability across the many individuals in cages. The mean growth across all individuals would be different. He further noted that fish caught in Portuguese traps were leaving the Mediterranean; given that their condition was poor at this point, the potential for growth was very high.

Libya inquired about how temperature could affect growth and the maximum and minimum sample size for the growth rate studies. In response the GBYP Coordinator responded that he could not provide details about sample size immediately. He noted that temperatures were recorded at each site and that the sites were chosen to be representative of all farming sites in the Mediterranean. Canada inquired how the growth rates calculated across multiple studies would be integrated. In response the GBYP Coordinator noted the request from the Commission was to explicitly consider the different sites and the subsequent analysis would highlight the differences.

The USA inquired, given the Chair's responses to the SCRS and the stated purpose of the exercise to determine what a feasible range of growth was, if this set of studies was appropriate to answer this question. The EU stated that this study could remain useful and getting realistic growth rate estimates from caging onwards remained the key issue to determine. In response, the Chair noted that the SCRS had already determined that this study should prove useful and that it may be too early to determine otherwise. He further noted that if growth rates would not turn to be a useful tool to estimate catch weights, then the Commission might want to consider other tools such as direct measurement using artificial intelligence (AI) technologies. Canada sought clarification for the Chair's response to the SCRS: the Chair confirmed that weight at capture, which would be estimated based on the length at caging and the length weight relationship for wild fish, was to be used for the growth rate estimation. The EU explained that it is rarely possible to use the stereoscopic cameras at the time of the first transfer, just after the catch, because the oceanographic conditions are not stable enough to do this. This is why the only possible figures to be used are those established at the time of caging.

The Japanese company NEC provided a short presentation on the use of AI to estimate fish size. Their technology would, once the data are transmitted to the cloud, automatically determine fish size and estimate weight using video. This would eliminate errors injected by human-made measurement. The technology is in active use on tuna farms and other aquaculture facilities in Japan. Moreover, the company was developing fish counting technology. They noted their desire to understand how this technology might be used for ICCAT operations. They presented the value of the approach in its ability to reduce human-induced measurement and fish selection (preferential selection of large fish) errors as well as an example of the underwater stereoscopic camera that could be used for this purpose.

A second presentation by the Japanese company Yanmar was provided to the group on new technology for automatic fish counting and fish measurement using AM-100, which was similar to the previous one. He provided an overview and video presentation and stressed that the technology had the capacity to work in natural conditions and errors can be corrected later and more importantly it would not require any transmission of data for analysis.

There was no time for questions about the presentations. The Panel was encouraged to contact the companies with their specific questions.

## **7.2 Draft protocol for Northern Albacore Exceptional Circumstances**

In accordance with the procedures which had been agreed by the Commission, the Chair of Panel 2 had circulated a document regarding the list of indicators for comment prior to the meeting.

Canada, Morocco and the USA had provided comments, but some of these required further clarification from the SCRS. The Chair had sent the draft to the SCRS for comment and clarification, and the responses are contained in **Appendix 9**.

Haritz Arrizabalaga (the EU), Rapporteur for the SCRS Albacore Species Group, presented a Brief Update on North Atlantic Albacore Exceptional Circumstances. The summary document is attached as **Appendix 10**. He provided an overview of what exceptional circumstances were, and under what circumstances they could be considered triggered. To determine if such exceptional circumstances exist, additional data (catch, CPUE, etc.) would be needed. Different indicators could be used for different circumstances – depending on if there is a new benchmark assessment, application of the harvest control rule, etc.

Taking into account the Panel 2 discussions and input provided by CPCs to the March 2020 Panel 2 meeting, the SCRS updated the list of indicators to detect such Exceptional Circumstances. He referred to 2020 examples demonstrating how modelling output was examined to check if exceptional circumstances had occurred.

The Chair reminded that **Appendix 9** was the key document for revision by the Panel. Based on the comments received by CPCs, he identified several points in need of discussion and went through the document page by page to ensure that the edits he had made would be acceptable.

The Panel discussed the draft in some detail. In summary, they agreed to the following:

- On the first page, the two footnotes concerning  $B_{MSY}$  and  $F_{MSY}$  under the principle “Stock Dynamics” would be combined to streamline the text. Similarly, the footnotes for  $B_{MSY}$  and  $F_{MSY}$  under the principle “Application of the MP” would be streamlined.
- On the second page, the referenced document in the footnote would be specified with the ICCAT document number (SCRS/2020/153).
- On the third page, point 4 (management objectives) would be deleted.

The Chair noted the need to discuss the process, i.e., the next step on the understanding that the list of indicators had been finalized with those changes. The SCRS responded that they would provide additional or alternative text on the definition of the “full range of values”, and how this set of indicators would be evaluated and reported. The SCRS would also further consider how to reflect the concepts associated with the “Catch” criteria, which were currently reflected in the table under two different principles and evaluated on different timelines. They would reflect the results of these discussions in their responses to the Commission in the September SCRS report.

The Chair noted that his question was broader than just the SCRS’ work, but rather, that it was about what the next steps for SCRS and Panel 2 would be with the objective of adopting a management procedure (MP) in 2021. The Panel agreed that the so-called metarule reflected in the Chair’s 2020 proposal for a northern albacore exceptional circumstances protocol, as reflected in and commented on before, during, and after the 2020 Panel 2 intersessional meeting, should form a good basis for further work. The USA requested the Chair explain the next steps and timing necessary to finalize a protocol at the November 2021 Commission meeting. In response, the Chair’s proposal was as follows:

- Panel 2 should send material to the Albacore Species Group in June for their review. To this end, the Chair would revise, based on input received to-date, the draft exceptional circumstances protocol included in Appendix 8 of the Report of the Intersessional Meeting of Panel 2 in 2020. The draft protocol includes the list of indicators for determining exceptional circumstances and metarules, such as a decision tree to guide Commission action in the event exceptional circumstances are triggered.
- The Chair will provide a timeline for revising this document and circulating it to Panel 2 members for review before sending it to the SCRS Albacore Species Group in June.

The SCRS representative stressed that once that indicators are agreed, the SCRS would have to examine in much greater detail what can or should transpire in the event that exceptional circumstances are triggered. This would require a great deal of coordination between the SCRS and Panel 2. The Panel agreed that this should occur.

In a related matter, the USA noted that exceptional circumstances need not be finalized and incorporated into an MP before it could be adopted by the Commission by November. They noted that in the event it was not possible to complete the protocol for the exceptional circumstances, it was their view that the MP could be adopted in any case if that was the decision of Panel 2 and the Commission. The Chair noted that, given his experience with southern bluefin tuna, it would be prudent to try to agree to the exceptional circumstance protocol when the MP is adopted but it was not required. The EU added that they thought it should be possible to have adopted an exceptional circumstances protocol in time for the Commission but did not rule out adopting an MP without this protocol having been agreed. The Chair concluded that tangible progress on these issues would need to be evaluated once the various tasks of the groups are complete before making any decision on a way forward, but that if the protocol is not ready for adoption in November, this would not necessarily preclude action to adopt an MP.

### **7.3 Brief overview of BFT MSE work**

Dr John Walters, SCRS Rapporteur for West Atlantic Bluefin Tuna presented a Brief Update of Bluefin MSE process, attached as **Appendix 11**. He outlined sets of key milestones for future MSE work in 2021 and 2022 as follows:

#### 2021 Key Milestones:

- To adopt a reference grid of operating models;
- To implement a plausibility weighting scheme for the grid;
- Initiate an independent peer review of the MSE code;
- To refine a set of index and model-based candidate management procedures (CMP) under development from six individual developer teams;
- The operating models will also be 'reconditioned' - a process which will bring them up to a terminal year of 2018 and will incorporate the most recent index improvements which will occur as part of the bluefin tuna workplan;
- Choice of a limited number CMPs to be approved by the SCRS and presented to the Commission (Panel 2);
- Dialogue Meeting with Panel 2 in the 2021 Commission meeting. The primary purpose of these initial CMPs will be to illustrate the process, elucidate the inherent management trade-offs, gauge the acceptability of CMPs and be provided with recommendations for their further refinement.

#### 2022 Key Milestones:

- During 2022, further dialogue with Panel 2 will be critical to refining these initial CMPs to best achieve acceptability across the various trade-offs;

- Develop guidance on developing exceptional circumstances provisions (to be finalized by the end of 2023) and associated management responses (assuming that the CMP could be adopted without the exceptional circumstances having been agree-to);
- SCRS continues to refine (improve) CMPs;
- Presentation of CMPs (no more than 3) to Commission at the 2022 Annual meeting for potential adoption of one of these for 2023 TAC advice.

The Panel discussed the presentation. The Chair commented that there were differences in the steps applied for MSE in bluefin tuna vs. albacore. The EU noted a few general points. In particular, they noted that there was an urgent need for an updated dialogue to clarify the adequacy of candidate MP as well as the adequacy of the existing management objectives. The principal concern they wished to get some answers about was why the existing CMPs did not consider the status quo procedure (or some approximation of it). Secondly, they inquired about how the “adequacy” of a given MP would be defined. In response, he concurred that dialogue was essential but that it would be most useful once the Group had made some progress. With respect to the definition of adequacy, this would be determined in terms of a set of performance metrics. He noted that while the status quo MP (i.e. single stock, single area models) would not be evaluated, management advice would be provided for the eastern and western stock individually.

The EU did not necessarily agree that the dialogue should occur only after good progress on BFT MSE was made. Managers needed to be consulted on the suitability of MPs in case there were problems with the proposed CMPS that could compel the SCRS to substantially revise their work. The SCRS was open to that dialogue but inquired how such a dialogue could be fit into the tight calendar between now and the Commission. The hope was that there would be a chance to discuss the BFT MSE at the dialogue before the Commission. The Chair noted that the SCRS would need to provide several CMPs in order to allow managers to choose an MP. Norway supported the EU position noting that spatial interactions and differences in the population size would make it particularly challenging and that having a contingency plan to implement the *status quo* management procedure should any CMP fail, or if the process itself fails to generate agreement on OMs or CMPs would be prudent. It was noted that, in fact, regular assessments were planned in 2021 for WBFT and in 2022 for EBFT. Canada concurred that the more interactions between BFT MSE scientists and the Commission managers would be beneficial noting that unlike albacore, bluefin tuna would involve changing the existing paradigm from essentially single stock single-area management practice to a multi-area, mixed stock paradigm. Canada inquired further what the intention of the November BFT MSE Meeting was, noting that all CPCs would be aware that this was their opportunity to provide feedback to the SCRS about the BFT MSE.

The EU requested that the SCRS provide CMPs that are independent for each stock, i.e., separate management areas. The SCRS responded that indeed management advice would be provided in CMPs for each separate area but that the stocks would be linked biologically in the operating models. The SCRS also further noted that there would be the opportunity to have further dialogue in 2022 and explore improvements to existing CMPs.

The USA echoed Canada’s request for clarity on the November 2021 BFT MSE meeting. Specifically, it should be clear in the Panel 2 intersessional report and on the ICCAT website if the meeting is of Panel 2 or of the Standing Working Group on Dialogue between Fisheries Scientists and Managers (SWGSM) so that all CPCs would be able to plan their attendance accordingly. The U.S. understanding was that the 12 November 2021 meeting was of Panel 2. Canada agreed. The Chair clarified that the meeting would be held as a Panel 2 meeting focusing on BFT MSE.

## **8. Introduction of draft Recommendations on E-BFT**

On the basis of the Conclusions of the Working Group on Bluefin tuna Control and Traceability Measures presented to and revised by Panel 2 at its 2020 meeting, it was agreed that various provisions of Rec. 19-04 and other relevant ICCAT measures including Recs. 06-07, 18-12, and 18-13 could potentially benefit from being clarified, combined, streamlined, or otherwise improved and reinforced. The Chair of that Working Group, therefore, developed a “Draft recommendation by ICCAT amending the Recommendation 19-04 establishing a multi-annual management plan for bluefin tuna in the eastern Atlantic and the Mediterranean”, attached in **Appendix 12**.

The Chair of the Working Group on Bluefin Tuna Control and Traceability Measures presented the aforementioned document which considered amendments to Rec. 19-04 for the sake of clarifying and seeking a common interpretation of the recommendation for all the CPCs and to improve and reinforce some key control activities, with the view to having a harmonised and solid legal basis for effective implementation and enforcement. These changes included provisions which were previously scattered among other Recommendations such as Rec. 06-07 and Rec. 18-13. All these changes were marked with explanatory notes at the beginning of each modified provision, indicating the origin and justification of the proposed change for revising this draft in preparation for adoption by the Commission at its 2021 Annual Meeting.

Japan asked the EU or any other CPC involved in the farming of live BFT for guidance and supporting material such as a flow chart of the activities and measures involved to make these changes more understandable due to their complexity and technical nature. The USA supported this request. The Working Group Chair noted that it would be no problem to provide a flow chart, and that the EU is available to clarify or explain the reasons for the changes introduced in the text in informal meetings as needed.

With respect to the intersessional process, the USA noted that making decisions by correspondence would be time-consuming and difficult - particularly if there was any controversy. Holding one or more informal online meetings could ease the process.

In response, the Panel 2 Chair suggested a tentative schedule for the whole process:

- Comments on this paper should be submitted to the Secretariat by the end of April;
- A revised version would be circulated mid-June;
- Comments on the revised version should be submitted to the Secretariat by mid-July;
- The Panel 2 Chair would assess the resulting draft and schedule a virtual meeting for discussing it if required.

Morocco stated the importance of these amendments and the need to prioritise them. Morocco has also requested that priority be given to the points concerning Recs. 18-12 and 18-13 endorsed by Panel 2 during last year's meeting.

Tunisia suggested that some amendments outside the scope of control and traceability measures could be made to Rec. 19-04, taking advantage of the current process. The USA noted that there could be merit in clarifying other aspects of 19-04 during the intersessional period, where needed, to ease discussions in November.

The EU raised their concerns about opening the entire text for amendment as it would delay the completion of the main objective: clarifying control and traceability measures. This view was supported by Morocco by reiterating the need to prioritise these control and traceability measures.

The Panel could not agree to focus only on the control measures discussed at the working group and Panel 2 levels last year. Accordingly, the Chair suggested changing the schedule slightly, that is: (i) an intersessional virtual meeting will be held in fall, likely from September 13-15, 2021; (ii) input on the proposal until the time of the fall intersessional meeting will focus on amendments related only to monitoring and control measures of Rec. 19-04; and (iii) input during the fall intersessional meeting can include not only amendments related to monitoring and control measures but also any other issues related to Rec. 19-04. This approach was agreed by the Panel.

It was confirmed by the Secretariat that, in order to facilitate the Panel members work, interpretation could be provided for the fall intersessional meeting and a Microsoft Word version of the document would be circulated for the purpose of making revisions to the draft recommendation.

The EU also briefly introduced a paper on the use of Remote Electronic Technology (Rem) on board bluefin tuna processing vessels. The EU explained that in its opinion the available control tools are not sufficient for effective control of processing vessels and that the project offers the opportunity to use control resources more efficiently. The EU also stated that the pilot project is just a testing phase and the information collected will not be used for control or enforcement purposes, and that for the objectives of the pilot it would be sufficient to equip 2 or 3 processing vessels.

Japan stated that it was not convinced of the need to place remote cameras on board processing vessels as regional observers were required to monitor all harvesting operations. The Chair suggested continuation of informal discussion between the EU and Japan towards the 15th Meeting of the Integrated Monitoring Measures (IMM) Working Group in June to which this paper would be submitted for further consideration.

#### **9. Adoption of report and adjournment**

The Chair thanked all participants for their work and adjourned the meeting. The meeting report was adopted by correspondence.