

INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE  
CONSERVATION OF ATLANTIC TUNAS



COMMISSION INTERNATIONALE POUR LA  
CONSERVATION DES THONIDES DE L'ATLANTIQUE

COMISION INTERNACIONAL PARA LA  
CONSERVACION DEL ATUN ATLANTICO

Madrid, 5 March 2026

## ICCAT GBYP CIRCULAR # G-00096 / 2026

**SUBJECT: CALL FOR TENDERS - ATLANTIC BLUEFIN TUNA BIOLOGICAL STUDIES - ICCAT ATLANTIC-WIDE RESEARCH PROGRAMME FOR BLUEFIN TUNA (GBYP - PHASE 15-2026)**

I would like to transmit a Call for tenders for the *Atlantic Bluefin Tuna Biological Studies*, which will be carried out within the ICCAT Atlantic Wide Research Programme for Bluefin Tuna (GBYP), in line with the SCRS workplan for this year.

I would be grateful if you could distribute this Call for Tenders to qualified people and institutions that may be interested.

ICCAT is kindly requesting a quotation for such work, which shall be developed according to the Terms of reference herein attached. The detailed offer shall be submitted **only to the attention of** the ICCAT Executive Secretary, [Mr Camille Jean Pierre Manel](#), and Cc'ing [Ms. Stasa Tensek](#), by **27 March 2026**.

Please accept the assurances of my highest consideration.

*Executive Secretary*



Camille Jean Pierre Manel

### **DISTRIBUTION:**

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**– Cooperating Parties, Entities or Fishing Entities**

**Attachment:** Terms of Reference – Biological Studies GBYP Phase 15 – 2026.

## Terms of Reference

### Atlantic Bluefin Tuna Biological Studies ICCAT Atlantic-Wide Research Programme for Bluefin Tuna (GBYP – Phase 15-2026)

#### 1. Background and objectives

The main objectives of the ICCAT Atlantic-Wide Research Programme for Bluefin Tuna (GBYP) are to improve: (a) the understanding of key biological and ecological processes, (b) current assessment methodology, (c) the management procedures, and (d) advice.

Key tasks to achieve these objectives are biological sampling and analyses, which provide indispensable data for conducting the bluefin stock assessment and Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) process, in line with the aforementioned objectives.

Consequently, one of the core activities of GBYP are the so-called Biological Studies, under which in 2011 GBYP started a biological sampling programme that complements those carried out by CPCs, aiming to ensure the availability of representative samples to carry out the studies required to develop proper stock assessments. Most of the sampling activities have been carried out under ad hoc Calls for Tenders for sampling and sample analysis. Additional samples have been collected separately in farms (adult fish) and, opportunistically, by the ICCAT Regional Observer Programs (ROPs) and GBYP tagging teams.

The resulting biological samples, including otoliths, spines, gonads and muscle for genetic studies are stored in the GBYP tissue bank. In parallel to sampling activities, microchemical, genetic, histological and morphological analyses have been carried out based on the samples from this tissue bank, according to the recommendations provided by the SCRS and the GBYP Steering Committee.

In GBYP Phases 13 and first year of Phase 14, following the recommendations of the SCRS adopted by the Commission in 2022 and 2023, GBYP biological studies focused on genetic analyses aiming at informing a feasibility study for the potential implementation of a Close-Kin Mark-Recapture (CKMR) study for the determination of the absolute abundance of the Atlantic bluefin tuna (BFT) eastern stock, which is one of the main uncertainties affecting Atlantic bluefin tuna stock assessment. However, during the 24th Special Meeting of the Commission held in November 2024, the workplan for the effective implementation of a CKMR study in the eastern Atlantic bluefin tuna stock from 2025 onwards, was not accepted. Therefore, during the [2025 ICCAT Bluefin Tuna Species Group ICCAT Intersessional Meeting](#) (Sète, 8-11 April 2025), the Bluefin Tuna Species Group (SG) updated the Bluefin Tuna SG workplan for 2025, setting a series of research priorities not related to CKMR implementation.

Consequently, considering the previous SCRS workplans adopted by the Commission, and the recent recommendations from the bluefin tuna SG, the priorities for the Biological Studies for the first year of GBYP Phase 15 (2026) that are addressed through this Call for Tenders include the following specific objectives:

1. Maintain and improve a GBYP tissue bank capable of providing the samples required to carry out the studies necessary for improving the understanding of key biological and ecological processes affecting bluefin tuna, particularly stock piling samples that can be used for population-level genomics studies.
2. Consolidate the implementation of an Information System allowing for the proper management of the samples and data generated by the biological studies, integrating not only metadata on sampling and analytical tasks, but whenever possible, the results from such analyses.

3. Develop epigenetic clock on different tissues providing aging that will be used for stock status determination and future MSE reviews ([Recommendation by ICCAT amending Recommendation 22-09 establishing a management procedure for Atlantic bluefin tuna to be used for both the western Atlantic and eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean management areas \(Rec. 23-07\)](#)). Provision starting in 2028 if genetic tools for aging become operational.

In order to fulfil these objectives, the tasks to be carried out are detailed in the following section.

As part of this programme, scientific institutes and/or public or private entities are asked to submit tenders to carry out the entire project or its single components.

## 2. Contractor tasks

The tenderer will work in close consultation with the ICCAT Secretariat. Samplings will follow the [Sampling protocol](#), taking into account the strata reported in the attached table. Also, duplication (i.e., of existing national or other sampling programs) must be carefully avoided.

The analyses will mostly follow the [methodologies](#) already established in previous Phases.

Although [Recommendation by ICCAT concerning the Atlantic-wide research programme for bluefin tuna \(GBYP\) \(Rec. 11-06\)](#) provides the means to ensure better conditions while carrying out biological and genetic sampling activities in international waters and those under jurisdiction of coastal States, most of which are ICCAT CPCs, the Tenderer will be responsible for all necessary agreements with local authorities, local fishermen and industries when carrying out sampling within national jurisdictions.

The biological samples collected and/or analyzed will be property of the ICCAT at the end of the contract.

The Tenderer(s) will provide proposal(s) for the provision of the following services:

*Maintenance and management of the GBYP tissue bank:*

- a) Provide appropriate storage for any biological samples collected so far, after reception and quality checking, following the system already adopted. The Tenderer will also ensure correct storage of all samples that will be collected under this Call for Tenders eventually, coming from other GBYP contracts or MoUs (i.e., biological samples from tagging activities). Management will also include delivery of the necessary samples to the entities in charge of the analyses. If one of the tenderers was engaged in previous Phases, it will provide at the beginning of the contract a full detailed catalogue of all samples available in the GBYP tissue bank, including all residuals from previous Phases; the catalogue will be detailed by stratum and size classes and will be updated at the end of the contract.

*Sampling:*

- b) Specification of the biological data and samples to be collected by strata and size class including a clear prioritization under the budget. These samples should be complementary to those collected within the frameworks of CPCs sampling programs. The sampling strata are defined in the attached table.

If necessary, the tenderer(s) could update the Protocols for the biological and genetic sampling and the analyses to be conducted (e.g. individual weight and length should always be recorded for all samples); the current protocol is available [here](#). These protocols will provide the opportunity for carrying out several analyses on the same otolith (e.g. ageing and elemental composition), optimizing the collection efforts.

*Analyses:*

- c) Perform genetic analyses of bluefin tuna samples, focusing on developing an epigenetic clock providing aging. Regarding the development of the epigenetic clock, the specific tasks should be:
- At least 250 samples of Atlantic bluefin tuna specimens will be analyzed. In these 250 samples, the entire age range should be represented, with at least approximately 10 specimens by age class, as well as individuals from both sexes.
  - The study should deliver an age calibrated model for Atlantic bluefin tuna, including accuracy, precision and mean absolute error.
  - Muscle samples from specimens will be provided to the analytical team from the GBYP and other laboratories tissue banks. Sample metadata to include sex, location and date of sampling, gear and sampling lab will be provided to the analytical team. Direct ageing by means of schlerochronological methods will also be provided based on standard and validated protocols.
  - In order to reduce costs and meet the deadlines for the study, samples of specimens with genetic origin already assigned and/or whose otoliths have been previously read (with high reading confidence) should be favored.

For the provision of the analysis of the item c), the tender must include a summary table with the type and number of analyses that will be conducted on the samples collected or already stored and their respective cost per analysis.

*Information System:*

- d) Update and refine, following ICCAT GBYP guidelines, the currently available database on the samples included in the GBYP Tissue Bank, advancing in the integration of metadata on sampling, analytical tasks and the results from these analyses.

The Tenderer(s) should endeavor to ensure full coverage of priority sampling strata (considering what is specified above) and analyses of the maximum possible number of samples. Proposals covering one or more points from a) to d) can be submitted; therefore, the Tenderer(s) can optionally apply for all or several tasks or for a specific task or sub-set of sampling areas. The Tenderer(s) will also clearly identify availability for the scientific staff to participate in any GBYP Operational Meeting at short notice. In the case of a consortium or group of entities, an administrative and a scientific responsible entity should be identified, along with a Scientific Committee on which each entity carrying out a scientific duty will be represented by a scientist.

### **3. Contractor minimum qualifications**

- Documented multi-year experience in tuna biological studies (preferably bluefin tuna); previous experience in large-scale biological sampling.
- For the genetic specialist(s): documented multi-year experience of genetic analysis; previous studies on tuna species will be preferred.
- Availability of sufficient qualified scientific staff to carry out the duties.
- Availability of at least one specialist in managing biological databases.
- Excellent working knowledge of one of the three official languages of ICCAT (English, French, Spanish). Sound knowledge of English is highly desirable.



#### 4. Request for bids

Interested entities should submit an offer to the ICCAT Executive Secretary, [Mr. Camille Jean Pierre Manel](#), with copy to [Ms. Stasa Tensek](#) by **27 March 2026**, including:

- a) The detailed offer covering one or more points from a) to d) as detailed above.
- b) The curricula of the scientific staff.
- c) The curriculum of the institution(s) or entity(ies), with any documented experience in the field, including recent and relevant contracts for the same or similar items and other references (including contract numbers, points of contact with telephone numbers and other relevant information).
- d) The preliminary estimated budget for collection and analysis of samples, tissue bank maintenance, information system further development and management, to be detailed by individual task and subtask. The costs of coordination should be included in the cost of each individual task/subtask. Additionally, the budget will be broken down by these components: personnel costs, overhead, travel, consumables, equipment and subcontracts. An overhead to cover administrative and general costs could be accepted up to a maximum limit of 10% of personnel costs, while subcontracts can be allowed up to a maximum of 40% of the budget. Any discount terms will be clearly mentioned.
- e) The name, address, and telephone number of the tendering body.
- f) The institutional and administrative background of the tendering body (e.g., statutes, type of institution, annual budget, budget control procedures, etc.).
- g) A detailed list of any subcontracting activities.
- h) A declaration that the offering institution will follow the [Sampling protocol](#) and the definition of sampling strata as provided in the attached table, as well as this Call for Tenders and the administrative rules specified in the contract.
- i) A declaration that all the comments eventually made on the draft final report (**Deliverable #3**) will be incorporated into the final report (**Deliverable #4**) prior to submission to the ICCAT SCRS.
- j) A declaration that the staff and all the subcontracted staff will be covered by full insurance for the sampling activities and the laboratory work to be carried out according to the Call for Tenders, excluding ICCAT from all the responsibility concerning the work to be carried out by each offering institution.
- k) Acknowledgment of this Call for Tenders (if applicable).
- l) A statement specifying the extent of agreement with all the terms, conditions, and provisions included herein.

Offers that fail to furnish the required documentation or information, or that reject the terms and conditions of the Call for Tenders, may be excluded from consideration.

Contractors can be either research institutions such as government or private laboratories, universities, or private consultancy firms or other entities having the qualifications required.

The Contractor should be available to report to any meeting requested by ICCAT.

#### 5. Deliverables

**Deliverable #1:** A **short report** on sampling or research activities, including all protocols for samplings and the analyses (for those tasks only), including the description of the work carried out up to that date, to be submitted at the latest 30 days after signature of the contract.

**Deliverable #2:** A **progress report** on the activity, in a form of an SCRS document, to be submitted at the latest by **1 September 2026**, including the description of the work carried out up to that date, which should be presented at the September 2026 Bluefin Tuna Species Group meeting.

**Deliverable #3:** A **draft final report** to be submitted by **30 November 2026** at the latest, including:

I. The scientific report, taking into account relevant scientific literature, containing:

- a) A full description of the work carried out during the biological studies;
- b) A detailed description of the methodology and protocols (only for sampling and analyses activities);
- c) Maps of the areas in which the sampling or the research was carried out, in accordance with the biological sampling strata or the proposal;
- d) Detailed tables with the definitive number of samples by stratum, fishery, size class and type, with the related statistical analysis (for those activities) or tables showing the results of the field research activities;
- e) A detailed description of the analyses carried out and of the results achieved (for these tasks only);
- f) The detailed and updated catalogue of samples stored in the GBYP Tissue Bank; link(s) in the format of the Excel table provided by the ICCAT Secretariat
- g) An Executive Summary of the final report.

II. A PowerPoint presentation of the main results.

4. **Deliverable #4:** The **final report**, to be prepared taking into account any comments provided by the relevant SCRS officers or the ICCAT Secretariat, and the full administrative report including copies of all the administrative documents, and to be submitted by **20 December 2026**, at the latest.

5. **Payment details**

Disbursements will be made according to the following schedule:

- 1) 30% of the total amount of the contract upon **signature of the contract** and after receiving a regular invoice which may be submitted at the latest 30 days after the signature of the contract;
- 2) 25% upon completion and acceptance of **Deliverable #1** and after receiving a regular invoice.;
- 3) 25% upon completion and acceptance of **Deliverable #3** and after receiving a regular invoice.;
- 4) 20% after the approval of the final report (**Deliverable #4**) and approval of the administrative documents and after receiving a regular invoice, no later than **20 December 2026**.

6. **Selection of proposals**

The ICCAT Secretariat will review the offer(s). Following the revision process, the ICCAT Executive Secretary will notify the entity selected for the contract as soon as the selection process is completed. The contract will be awarded on the basis of competitive tendering and the evaluation of proposals will be undertaken objectively, consistently and without bias towards particular suppliers.

Proposal(s) will be evaluated against a pre-determined set of criteria, which include: i) cost (30%); ii) proven track record (30%); iii) technical merit based on workplan (30%); and iv) flexibility as regards future changes in requirements (10%).

7. **Logistics**

All documents provided by the Contractor must be in MS Word or compatible software, tables must be in Excel format or compatible, figures and pictures must be in JPEG or TIFF format or compatible. The format of the data bank will be agreed with the ICCAT Secretariat. All documents submitted must be in English, French or Spanish.



## 8. Copyright

All the material produced by the Contractor will remain the property of the ICCAT, will be kept confidential, and cannot, in any case, be circulated by the Contractor. The scientific use of the data by the Contractor will always be notified to ICCAT in advance for clearance.

For further information concerning this Call for Tenders, please contact the GBYP Coordinator, [Dr. Francisco Alemany](#).