

ICCAT ATLANTIC-WIDE RESEARCH PROGRAMME FOR BLUEFIN TUNA (GBYP)
REPORT OF THE *AD HORAS* MEETING OF THE GBYP STEERING COMMITTEE
Madrid, September 29, 2011

1. Opening of the meeting

The GBYP Steering Committee (SC) meeting, which was organised *ad horas*, taking advantage of the presence of various members during the ICCAT-SCRS Species Group on Bluefin Tuna, was held in Madrid on September 29, 2011, with the participation of Messrs. Driss Meski, Pilar Pállares, Josu Santiago, Jean-Marc Fromentin and Clay Porch. Messrs. Laurence Kell, M'Hamed Idrissi (GBYP Assistant Coordinator) and Antonio Di Natale (GBYP Coordinator) from the ICCAT Secretariat also attended the meeting.

Dr. Santiago was nominated to chair of the meeting and he welcomed all the participants.

2. *Biological sampling.*

The report provided during the SCRS Species Group by the Consortium carrying out the biological and genetic sampling was considered very satisfactory by the SC. The SC considers very positive and encouraging the experience of having an international Consortium in charge of a specific GBYP activity, because this strategy allows to bring into the system many institutions and expertises from several countries and this will result in increasing capacity building, in a better cooperation and in improvements of the scientific knowledge on bluefin tuna.

3. *Tagging Programme.*

Taking into account the presentation of the tagging activity carried out so far which was provided to the SCRS Species Group, the SC expresses some concerns because the total number of bluefin tuna tagged from the beginning of this activity (1950 tags) by the Consortium contracted by the GBYP seems too low for reaching the final target within the contract time frame. The SC recommends strictly monitoring this activity.

4. *Tag Awareness campaign.*

The meeting which was held with the two SCRS tagging coordinators during the SCRS Species Group revealed different points of views and their worries for changing the current ICCAT general system, both in terms of communication campaign and rewards. The SC recalled both the recommendations provided by the participants to the GBYP Operational meeting on Tagging held in February 2011 and the recommendations adopted during the SC meeting in June-July 2011, when the GBYP tag awareness campaign was better defined and high rewards were recommended for improving the tag report and the tag recovery rates. The SC also recommended to change and improve the reward strategy, given the expanded nature of the GBYP tagging programme and the extremely low reporting rates in the past. The SC, after reiterating these recommendations, also recalled the need to activate as soon as the communication material will be ready the contacts with stakeholders and local Authorities in the Convention area; in a preliminary phase, the GBYP Coordination staff should be empowered to establish all the necessary contacts and travel to the various areas where the bluefin tuna fishery is carried out.

5. *Aerial surveys.*

A short updated report of the aerial surveys on bluefin tuna spawning aggregations in 2010 and 2011 was discussed and the ICCAT population dynamic expert pointed out that the results obtained so far, even taking into account the various difficulties encountered and the impossibility to survey some areas, are very encouraging and that a 2-year capital of data has to be preserved and possibly improved and incorporated in the assessment whenever a longer series will be able to produce an abundance trend. The preliminary analysis for detecting the minimum requirements

need for providing a trend was also discussed, even if it will be fully available later in the year. The SC recalled the previous recommendations and the fact that the preliminary analysis shows a minimum of 6/7 years of survey, to be conducted on a minimum length of 100,000 km, for detecting a 20% trend with acceptable CVs and this effort will require a correspondent increase of the budget, under the philosophy “the best possible results with the best possible effort”. The SC recommended continuing the GBYP aerial survey only if sufficient guaranties of obtaining all flight permits are provided by all CPCs concerned and if sufficient budget is available for surveying a much larger area than the current one, at least for a total length of 100,000 km. The SC also proposed to explore the possibility of shifting the target of the aerial survey to juvenile bluefin tuna, particularly in the Western Mediterranean, the Gulf of Lion, the Gulf of Gabes and the Adriatic Sea.

6. Budget:

The SC discussed the need to adjust and increase the budget figure for GBYP Phase 3 (2012) taking into account the condition to extend the aerial survey figure and a much more important tagging activity. For the first activity, the situation was already discussed under the previous point 5 and the Coordinator was requested to provide a budget figure to be presented to the SCRS in the following week. As concerns the tagging activity, it was discussed the possibility of improving the tagging, both in terms of the total number of tags to be implanted and the areas. The SC discussed also the possibility to carry out a scientific recapture of tagged fish along with the conventional tagging, for providing additional information on the mortality and increasing the recovery rate. A preliminary exploratory mandate for assessing the needs for a scientific recovery activity was given to two members of the SC (Polacheck and Porch), who should work in cooperation with the Coordinator. The SC discussed also the possibility of using electronic tags (miniPATs), both for repeating the very promising results obtained by the electronic tagging in Morocco in 2011, in the context of improving the knowledge of the reproductive traits and for improving the tagging activity in other areas and recommended to consider these activities for the budget in 2012. The SC also recommended improving sampling for maturity studies and possibly reallocating some budget for satisfying this need. The SC recommended to revise the budget according to the various proposal for improving the activities and requested the coordinator to provide options to be discussed at the SCRS in the following week for selecting the most adequate to be proposed to the Commission in November 2011.

7. Other matters

The SC recommended that the scientific results obtained by the GBYP must be better highlighted and strengthened.