

Opening Statement of the United States of America to Panel 1

21st Special Meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas

This year, Panel 1 faces the significant challenge of taking strong, effective measures to ensure the recovery of bigeye and yellowfin tunas – iconic species that are critical to the lives and livelihoods of fishermen throughout the Atlantic basin. It has become clear that ICCAT tropical tuna measures to date have not been effective. The 2018 stock assessment for bigeye tuna indicates that the stock is overfished and experiencing overfishing, and the yellowfin stock remains overfished. ICCAT has no choice but to make difficult management decisions at this meeting to ensure the recovery of bigeye tuna and set the stage for adoption of comprehensive yellowfin tuna management decisions in 2019. If we continue with the status quo, the SCRS advises that the stock has a higher risk of collapse than of rebuilding. At its July intersessional, Panel 1 began working towards a meaningful and *equitable* approach to the conservation and management of tropical tunas. All CPCs must work together now to develop a comprehensive, effective recovery program to conserve this important stock.

The SCRS has told us that a key driver in the decline of bigeye and yellowfin tuna stocks has been the extremely high catches of small fish – catches that have increased without control for many years. The impacts of the various fleets harvesting these species have not been equal. The SCRS analysis identified the disproportionate effect that fishing on FADs has had in driving down the MSY for bigeye and yellowfin. While the United States recognizes that all fleets and gear types have an impact on the status of tropical tuna stocks, the conservation burden for bigeye and yellowfin tunas cannot be shared equally among CPCs. Immediate action is needed to reduce the overall catch of bigeye, as well as the catch of small fish.

Facing these realities, it is critical that ICCAT adopt a rebuilding program for bigeye tuna during the 2018 annual meeting that, in line with Recommendation 11-13 *on the Principles of Decision-Making for ICCAT Conservation and Management Measures*, ends overfishing immediately and rebuilds with a high probability of success within as short a time as possible. An essential aspect of any rebuilding program will be provisions that reduce the catch of small fish in order to address growth overfishing, return MSY to historical levels, and support fair and equitable fishing opportunities for all gear types. Panel 1 must also consider measures to ensure that the bigeye TAC and other management measures will be effective, such as through quota allocations; tighter quota payback and carryover rules; and, where needed and appropriate, stronger MCS provisions and achievable, enforceable capacity controls.

The United States looks forward to working with all CPCs at this annual meeting to adopt fair, equitable, and effective measures that will rebuild bigeye tuna consistent with the Convention objective.

While we expect the focus of the Panel 1 management discussions this year to be on bigeye tuna, including the reduction of catch of small fish, yellowfin tuna clearly needs attention, and soon. According to the 2016 assessment, yellowfin tuna was overfished. In light of the recurring

overharvest of the TAC since the quota has been adopted, the SCRS this year concluded that the stock condition may have further degraded and that it is possible it is now experiencing overfishing. While we note that actions taken to conserve and manage bigeye tuna should also benefit yellowfin tuna, it is unclear whether they will be sufficient to recover this stock. The Panel needs to discuss next steps related to the conservation and management of yellowfin tuna, including issues of process and timing. A key part of this is to endorse the SCRS conclusion that the assessment now scheduled for 2020 should be moved up to 2019.