

ICCAT ANNUAL MEETING 2018**OPENING STATEMENT EUROPEAN UNION**

The European Union is particularly honoured to host the 21th Special meeting of ICCAT in the wonderful city of Dubrovnik. We would like to express our deep appreciation to the Croatian authorities for their hospitality and outstanding preparations, and acknowledge the fantastic work of the Secretariat for the excellent organisation of this meeting in Dubrovnik, and we wish the very best to the Executive Secretary for his first meeting at the helm of the Secretariat.

Not so long ago, ICCAT met in this city which is a UNESCO world heritage site, and took on the challenging task of adopting the recovery plan for Eastern Bluefin tuna. Since then, the status of this iconic stock has thankfully improved dramatically, prompting ICCAT to adopt a significant increase of the TAC last year and to set the scene for the adoption of a management plan this year. We are confident that CPCs will be able to once again demonstrate their willingness to work together to formally acknowledge the success of the recovery plan and move to a new phase through the adoption of a management plan.

This success demonstrates well ICCAT's, and its CPCs, capacity and determination to take hard decisions when they are needed and continue to drive forward the agenda of the sustainable exploitation of tunas and tuna like species in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean.

Despite this achievement, we are once again facing great challenges this year and the European Union stands ready to work with all CPCs to further strengthen ICCAT's governance through better science-based decisions, stronger control and enforcement measures and higher compliance by its members.

After several years of hard work by the ICCAT CPCs, the EU is looking forward to ICCAT at this meeting reaching a consensus on the Convention Amendment to turn ICCAT into an even more modern organisation.

This year, SCRS once again raised serious concerns regarding the status of the stock of bigeye tuna. The European Union was encouraged by the constructive discussions which took place during the intersessional meeting of Panel 1 last July and hopes that CPCs can build on this to adopt new ambitious and effective management measures for bigeye and other tropical tunas. The European Union has tabled an ambitious proposal that seeks to take the necessary actions in response the dire situation this stock faces and looks forward to working with other CPCs on this.

As in previous years, the European Union will also continue promoting the introduction of a fins naturally-attached policy, for which we welcome the increasing support by many Contracting Parties. Further action here is long overdue since it is widely recognised that the use of fin-to-carcass-weight ratios is not an adequate means to ensure that sharks are not finned.

The European Union is pleased with the continuous developments towards better science, including the critical MSE process being undertaken but also the efficient management of very significant research programs, such as the GBYP and the AOTTP programs for which the EU continues to provide substantial contributions. In order to secure the long-term future of these two crucial programs, we would urge ICCAT CPCs to identify sustainable financing mechanisms not relying on voluntary contributions.

As in the past, the European Union continues to attach a very high importance to the compliance process, which is crucial to ensure that the conservation measures adopted in ICCAT deliver efficiently on their objectives. We are committed to ensuring that ICCAT maintains a high level of commitment for the compliance review and assessment and we are confident that this process will continue to be guided by a solution-oriented and pragmatic approach in order to further enable ICCAT to stand by its global mission.

The European Union is looking forward to working constructively with all CPCs in order to achieve these ambitious goals at the 21st Special Meeting of ICCAT.