

STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN UNION

Intersessional meeting of Panel 1

16-17 November 2019

Palma de Majorca, Spain

In 2019, the ICCAT Scientific Committee (SCRS) has again highlighted the urgency in adopting new management measures to allow the recovery of bigeye tuna. The EU strongly regrets that despite positive engagement by the Parties during an intersessional meeting of Panel 1 (PA1) earlier in 2018, ICCAT was not able to make substantial progress during its Annual meeting in November 2018 on this stock.

This failure to agree on new management measures not only further delayed any potential recovery of the stock of bigeye tuna, but it unfortunately also reflects poorly on the capacity of the ICCAT Commission to take action in the context of stocks for which many CPCs express shared interests.

One of the critical elements discussed during the 2018 Annual meeting concerned the rights of developing coastal States to develop their fishery for tropical tuna. While this was not disputed by any CPCs in 2018, it nevertheless took up most of the time available in Panel 1 and technical discussions on the needed conservation and management measures could only be conducted in an ad-hoc working group operating on the margins of the meeting of Panel 1. It is essential for the success of this year's discussions that negotiations on fishing opportunities and on the required conservation and management measures proceed in parallel but separate tracks and they both receive sufficient attention and time under the careful leadership of the Chair of Panel 1.

As regards fishing opportunities, the European Union has listened carefully to the demands from developing coastal States and understands their legitimate desire to develop their fisheries for this resource. To guarantee the future of this fishery we must however fulfil our mandate for sustainable management of the stocks that ICCAT has been entrusted with by adopting a new management regime for tropical tunas that ensures that the stock is restored to levels that will allow exploitation in line with Convention objectives.

As one of the CPCs with an existing allocation for bigeye tuna, the EU would be required to make sacrifices to facilitate the establishment of fishing opportunities for CPCs with no established allocation. This would have some important consequences for many segments of the EU fleets, including small-scale artisanal fishermen operating in the EU outermost regions. Nonetheless, the EU is prepared to give serious consideration to the request for a new allocation key and to help accommodate these requests, provided this in turn can lead to establishing a new and more effective management regime for bigeye tuna and for tropical tuna in general. The European Union will therefore approach these negotiations in an open and constructive way with the objectives of reaching a satisfactory and balanced outcome.

For the EU to be in a position to voluntarily forfeit some of its existing fishing rights, it will however be critical to receive sufficient guarantees that these efforts will not be futile and that the overall package of measures to be adopted will have a realistic chance of leading to the recovery of the stock of bigeye tuna and prevents overfishing of tropical tuna in general.

In particular, it would be unconceivable to make concessions on fishing opportunities if in turn the respect of the TAC cannot be guaranteed under a new plan. As the SCRS has noted under the current recommendation catches in 2016-2017 exceeded the TAC by 20% and by 13% in 2018, contributing to further declines in stock size since 2015. In fact, although the TAC has been lowered repeatedly, the total catch removed from the stock has exceeded the TAC because it does not affect all countries that can catch bigeye tuna. In other words, the current system of management of the TAC has failed, by promoting overfishing without making those CPCs currently without catch limits accountable for their catches. The only way to address this problem is by ensuring that **each CPC is subject to clear fishing limits under a new scheme of TAC allocation**. The inclusion of the CPCs that can catch bigeye tuna under the TAC does not need to jeopardise the future development of fisheries by developing coastal States, but it is an absolutely crucial element to ensure that the TAC can be effectively implemented. Failing to do this would result in continuing overfishing and ignoring the scientific advice.

The **fishing capacity** is another crucial issue to be considered if any new management measures are to be successful. The discussions we had in the context of the 2018 Annual meeting, and the positions some Parties took regarding the right to develop fisheries without limit and without checks and balances in ICCAT, are clearly not consistent with the shared responsibility all CPCs have for sustainably managing this stock and raises questions as to ICCAT's ability to manage the stocks under its responsibility. Instead, ICCAT must draw inspirations from the way it has handled similar challenges encountered in the recent past, such as for Eastern and Mediterranean Bluefin tuna (BFT). The management of this fishery has many similarities with the management of tropical tunas, including the involvement of many developing coastal States. Nevertheless, one of the critical aspects of the successful recovery plan for BFT was that the participants in these fisheries all assumed responsibility in terms of the management of their fishing capacity and agreed to introduce ambitious control measures. Each CPC has therefore regularly presented, even in the context of very unstable political situations and sometimes-ongoing conflicts, its **fishing and capacity plans, demonstrating that the fishing capacity was commensurate with the fishing opportunities**. The collective evaluation of these fishing plans by ICCAT CPCs has allowed building confidence among CPCs that the measures were implemented fairly by all Parties, and ultimately helped secure the recovery of the stock and the significant increase in TAC that has occurred in recent years. **The submission of fishing and capacity plans by CPCs intending to fish on tropical tunas, and their verification by ICCAT, are therefore a key element required to secure a successful rebuilding plan and without such plans, it would be difficult to justify potential sacrifices by the EU.**

As coastal States, with collectively the greatest coastline in the ICCAT Convention Area and also the greatest EEZ in Atlantic (even without including the Mediterranean), the EU Member States are particularly important stakeholders, with a long history of involvement in the fisheries for Atlantic tropical tuna. These fisheries have a significant importance for fishing communities in several EU Member States with a strong reliance on these resources. The EU has always been acutely aware of this reliance and of the importance to manage these resources sustainably. The EU fleets are often misperceived as being only made of large pelagic industrial vessels, when in fact most of the operators involved in tropical tuna fisheries, particularly in the EU outermost regions of the Azores, the Canaries and Madeira, are operating small scale coastal vessels using sustainable fishing methods. These fisheries have a huge importance in supporting the coastal communities in these areas.

Important efforts have been made over the years to collect information on these fisheries and to study them, and the involvement of EU scientists continues to be very significant to this day. For instance, the EU recently promoted the development of the AOTTP program, with the main objectives of collecting new scientific information to support the rational management of the tropical tuna resources, contribute to the food security and economic growth of the Atlantic coastal States, and contribute to developing the scientific expertise of these coastal States. The EU financial contribution to this program is just under 13.5 million Euro over five years, emphasizing the importance of these fisheries for the Union and the commitment of the EU to support ICCAT's objectives.

More generally, the input from the EU scientists into the work of SCRS on tropical tunas remains unmatched. Since 2014, the EU and its Member States supported the attendance of scientific experts over 150 times. This participation resulted in the submission of 96 SCRS papers, and 42 peer reviewed publications. In addition, the EU supported 11 MSc theses dedicated to tropical tunas, and another 16 PhD theses, four of which were conducted by candidates from developing coastal States (one from Brazil, one from Morocco, and 2 from Côte d'Ivoire). These efforts by the EU to support capacity building in developing coastal States were also re-enforced by regular voluntary contributions to ICCAT to facilitate the participation of scientists and delegates to ICCAT meetings. In addition, the EU also provides annual voluntary contributions to support the scientific process in ICCAT, to a level of approximately 2 million Euro per year.

The European Union is therefore a strategic stakeholder in tropical tuna fisheries in ICCAT and will have a crucial role to play in reaching a potential agreement on new management measures for these fisheries. Once again, the EU will engage in this process in a very constructive way with the clear objective of finding an agreement which can provide assurances in terms of the sustainable management of these resources and in particular in terms of the recovery of the stock of bigeye tuna.