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**ICCAT ANNUAL MEETING 2019**  
**OPENING STATEMENT EUROPEAN UNION**

The European Union is very pleased to have been able to co-host the 26<sup>th</sup> Regular meeting of ICCAT in the beautiful city of Palma de Majorca, Balearic Islands, Spain. We would like to express our deep appreciation to the Spanish authorities, as well as to the autonomous Community of the Balearic Islands for their hospitality and outstanding preparations.

As you are probably aware, the work of ICCAT has a particular significance in this beautiful region, since the sea around the Balearic Islands is one of the most important spawning areas for Mediterranean bluefin tuna. This stock, and its successful recovery, perhaps more than any other, epitomizes the crucially important role of ICCAT for the sustainable management of tuna and sharks related species. We are hopeful that Palma de Mallorca will be remembered in the future for being the birthplace of a successful rebuilding program for bigeye tuna, and that we will draw inspiration from the success of the eastern and Mediterranean bluefin tuna recovery plan.

To reach an agreement on the management of tropical tunas will require cooperation and efforts by everyone, and the European Union is ready to play its part in this process and to contribute its fair share to finding a solution. We will also need to build on our experience and previous successes in ICCAT, and a priority will be to end overfishing by managing the TAC efficiently, like we already do for so many other stocks in ICCAT.

This year, we are also confronted with a very challenging situation for shortfin mako sharks and the Commission will be required to demonstrate its capacity and willingness to manage shark species in a pragmatic and efficient way. We would like to highlight the excellent cooperation of the ICCAT scientists working on sharks and we hope that this can be replicated at the levels of the CPCs for the benefits of these important fish. As in previous years, the European Union will continue to promote the introduction of a fins naturally-attached policy, for which we welcome the increasing support by many Contracting Parties and express the hope that ICCAT will finally be able to adopt this overdue measure.

The European Union is very grateful for the terrific work of the SCRS scientists, and appreciate the challenge it is to complete the many tasks they are faced with each year in trying to meet the Commission's expectations. In particular, important progress continues to be made in terms of the development of Management Strategies Evaluations for key stocks. We are also pleased by how the AOTTP programme, for which the EU contributed in excess of 13 million Euro, is delivering crucially important information on tropical tunas, and is contributing to further develop the scientific capacity in many ICCAT coastal States.

The EU however continues to think that it is important and urgent that ICCAT adopts a more long term and sustainable financing mechanisms to support the many scientific initiatives requested by the Commission.

Finally, the assessment of the compliance of the CPCs with ICCAT rules continues to remain a crucial process for the European Union, in order to ensure that the conservation measures adopted in ICCAT deliver efficiently on their objectives.

The European Union is looking forward to working constructively with all CPCs in order to achieve these ambitious goals at the 26<sup>st</sup> Regular Meeting of ICCAT.