

STATEMENT BY THE UNITED KINGDOM TO PANEL 2 ON WESTERN BLUEFIN TUNA (3RD ROUND)
(Document PA2-608C)

The UK would like to record its thanks to the Panel 2 Chair for his concerted efforts to achieve consensus on a measure for western bluefin tuna for 2021, in particular given the challenging circumstances this year in which CPCs have been unable to meet and discuss face to face. In lieu of meeting in person, the web conference meetings held were helpful and appreciated.

The UK supports fisheries management based on the best available scientific evidence and following a precautionary approach. Based on the 2020 stock assessment, the SCRS presented six management scenarios for three-year TAC advice. Three of these scenarios would have kept the probability of not overfishing the WBFT stock in line with ICCAT management objectives for each of the three projected years. It is therefore deeply disappointing that the proposal for adoption (608C) includes a TAC of 2,350 t for 2021 which is associated with a worryingly low probability – only 6% – of the WBFT stock not being overfished in 2021; put another way, that with a TAC of this level there is a 94% probability that the stock will be overfished in 2021. The UK regrets that CPCs must choose between this unsatisfactory measure on the one hand, and on the other the prospect of no measure at all and an unregulated fishery in 2021.

The UK does however welcome the fact that 608C includes text (to replace the current paragraph 4 of Rec. 17-06) which commits the Commission in its 2021 meeting to adopting significantly lower TACs for 2022 and 2023, which would bring the probability of not overfishing closer to more acceptable levels over the three year period, unless it decides otherwise based on new SCRS advice.

During the course of discussions, the UK noted the SCRS view that there are grounds to provide a better estimate of the population of the WBFT stock through a new stock assessment in 2021, with minimal disruption to the wider work of the SCRS, and in particular to the MSE process. With these assurances, and the helpful clarifications sought and received by other CPCs, the UK does not oppose the inclusion in 608C of the request for a stock assessment in 2021.

Taking these factors into account, acknowledging the challenges associated with decision-making by correspondence, and recognising the clear need as responsible parties to ICCAT to ensure there is no lapse in a measure being in place for WBFT in 2021, the UK will not block consensus on PA2-608C.