

OPENING STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN UNION

The European Union is looking forward to the 27th Regular meeting of ICCAT. Although we are not yet able to meet in person, the European Union welcomes this year's virtual meeting as an opportunity to address the most urgent issues and prepare the ground for discussions that will need to take place in the coming months. While there are challenges linked to the virtual format of the meeting this year, 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 better compliance by its members. Having in mind the difficult conditions that have existed since the start of the pandemic, we would also like to thank the ICCAT Secretariat for the preparation of the 27th Regular meeting and their hard work throughout the year.

With respect to stocks management measures, the European Union considers that there are several priorities which need decisions to be taken this year.

After several years of discussions between the ICCAT CPCs, the European Union believes that it is high time for ICCAT to reach, at this meeting, a consensus on more effective measures for the North Atlantic stock of shortfin mako shark. In order to facilitate an outcome, the European Union has shown considerable flexibility and was encouraged by the constructive discussions that took place during the Intersessional Meeting of Panel 4 in October and in the lead-up to this annual meeting. The European Union has been engaged in intense discussions with several CPCs to prepare the ground for a possible compromise and we believe that considerable progress has been achieved. The European Union would urge all CPCs to show flexibility and a willingness to compromise, so we can build on the momentum that has been achieved, so that new effective measures for shortfin mako can be adopted at this meeting.

The management of tropical tuna stocks remains one of the greatest challenges and should be an ICCAT priority. While gradual improvements have been made over recent years, further and much needed progress has been hampered since the start of the pandemic. Therefore, it is necessary to adopt a realistic, yet ambitious approach and to address the most pressing issues regarding the management of these resources. With this in mind, the European Union decided to table a proposal this year. The positive outcome of the stock assessment for bigeye tuna presents a unique opportunity to address the issue of a certain degree of reallocation of the fishing opportunities to developing coastal states. Although we are supportive of the Chair's efforts, our proposal aims to further draw on the intersessional exchanges we had this year, and to provide possible solutions to a range of issues for which action can no longer be postponed. Our proposal is articulated around key elements such as the setting of fishing opportunities which are sustainable and manageable in the long term; the establishment of a process to better manage fishing capacity; consolidation of the measures adopted in 2019 for the management of FADs, and addressing the relative weakness of the control regime currently in place for tropical tuna fisheries.

This year, the SCRS conducted an evaluation of the Mediterranean albacore stock based on data available until 2019 and concluded that this stock is overfished and experiencing overfishing. Recognising the current situation of the stock, the European Union is tabling a proposal for a rebuilding plan for Mediterranean albacore. This plan contains the management and technical measures required to stop the overfishing and to start rebuilding this stock.

Following on from ICCAT's commitment to consolidate measures concerning North Atlantic albacore, the European Union has also tabled a proposal, which recasts existing recommendations and establishes all the elements needed for a long-term management procedure.

The European Union is pleased with the continuous developments towards better science, including the critical Management Strategy Evaluation process being undertaken, but also efficient management of very significant research programs, such as the GBYP and the AOTTP programmes for which the EU continues to provide substantial contributions. In order to secure the long-term future of these two crucial programmes, we would urge ICCAT CPCs to identify sustainable financing mechanisms, not relying on voluntary contributions. Moreover, in view of the increasing workload of the ICCAT Secretariat, in particular since the start of the pandemic, we are of the view that there is a need for the STACFAD to discuss and to take a serious look at the Secretariat's workload.

As in the past, the European Union continues to attach a great importance to the compliance process. This process 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 strong commitment to 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 live up to its global mission.

Finally, the 27th ICCAT Regular Meeting will provide an opportunity to take an important decision on new Chairs for the various ICCAT bodies that are essential for the smooth running of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies in the coming months. While we welcome the fact that several candidates have been put forward, it is the European Union's hope that a balanced and acceptable package can be agreed by consensus. The European Union is looking forward to working constructively with all CPCs in order to achieve these ambitious goals at the 27th Regular Meeting of ICCAT.