

Europêche position on ICCAT plenary meeting 2021

Bigeye Tuna

Based on the draft submitted by the Chair of the Panel 1 for a revised ICCAT multi-annual conservation and management programme for tropical tunas

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Recitals:

- Europêche notes that the Standing Committee Research and Statistics (SCRS) estimates the Bigeye Tuna (BET) stock to be overfished although not overfished in 2019, and indicates that with a constant future catch of 61.500 tons, corresponding to the TAC established in Rec. 19-02, there is a high probability (97%) of maintaining the stock in the green quadrant of the Kobe diagram by 2034;
- Europêche notes the increase in catches of tropical tuna stocks by other Contracting Parties or Cooperating non-Contracting Parties, Entities or Fishing Entities (CPCs) in the last decade such as by Senegal, China, Korea or Brazil. There is a lack of knowledge on the volume of total removals and the number of juveniles caught by these fleets. A global and integral approach is needed covering all fleets targeting tropical tunas;
- Europêche notes that BET is one of the main species targeted by most longline and baitboat fisheries. Between 2015 and 2020, longline catches accounted for an average of 45% of the total catch, purse seine catches for 36%, baitboat catches for 10% and other fleets for 8%. It should also be noted that catches of CPCs not subject to catch limits in Rec 16-01 have increased from around 1.000 tons in 2011 to almost 7.000 tons in 2019;
- Europêche urges CPCs to take proportional effort and responsibility towards the positive evolution of the state of the stock. The management plan must concern all actors although compromising on a certain degree of flexibility in its implementation;
- Europêche recalls that among these measures, it is essential to improve the implementation of the management plan and to develop the collective collection of the necessary fishing data;
- Europêche reiterates that it is essential that all measures are controllable and enforced.

Europêche recommends the following on:

Catch limit

To end overfishing and allow stock recovery in accordance with Rec. 11/13, Europêche proposes a **TAC of 75.000 tons for all CPCs that are catching at least 1.000 tons of BET in the recent period.**

This allocation could consider:

- Current reference period for current CPCs subject to a catch limit,
- A different and more recent reference period for current non-quota CPCs,
- An additional replenishment premium for developing CPCs, if and when the stock is effectively fully rebuilt,
- A conditioned quota allocation to fisheries data reported by the different CPCs (no data = no quota).

In addition:

- All CPCs with purse seiners or large longliners flying their flags should be integrated in the CPCs' group subject to quota,
- Consequently, CPCs should not be subject to quota if BET catches are below 1.000 tons,
- **End carry over during recovery plan of the stock,**
- Return to the wording of paragraph 9 of Recommendation 16-01: In case the **annual catch limit for CPCs subject to a catch limit for BET is overshot, it should be deducted from the annual catch limit of the year Y+1 or Y+2**, depending on the ability of each CPC to monitor the consumption of its quota.

Europêche recalls that longline fleets account for about 50% of total catches of BET and that there are important gaps in terms of information regarding the exploitation rates based on abundance indexes (CPUE), total removals and the number of juveniles caught by the non-EU longliners. This is mainly due to misreporting and non-reporting of juvenile BET tuna as a result of discarding.

In order to improve future BET-stock assessments and to avoid practices of high-grading, Europêche proposes to extend the ICCAT Recommendation 17-01 on the **prohibition on discards** of tropical tunas caught by purse seiners **to all vessels fishing bigeye tuna and the application of 100% observer coverage on all industrial vessels catching bigeye tuna.**

Management of fishing capacity

Europêche proposes to establish limited entry to tropical tuna fisheries in the ICCAT area of competence through closed vessel registries, so that new active fishing vessels shall only be authorized to replace vessel already authorized with the same gear and within the same group of length overall, i.e. >20m or <20m length overall.

Management of FADs

Europêche notes that after examining trends in average BET catches by area and monthly distributions of catches, the SCRS concluded that the moratorium in the Gulf of Guinea has not been effective in reducing the mortality of juvenile bigeye tuna, mainly due to the redistribution

of effort to areas adjacent to the moratorium area and the increase in the number of fishing vessels.

Europêche therefore recommends a balanced approach to tackle efficiently the fishing capacity issues and to be cost-effective from a perspective of efficacy of monitoring, control and surveillance activities.

Europêche still opposes to a FAD closure to the ICCAT Convention area during three months and supports its elimination from the future management measure. Since the FAD closure stipulated in Rec. 19-02 was implemented in 2020 and 2021, its effects could not yet be assessed.

Nevertheless, Europêche considers that maintaining the current 3 month moratorium (in space and time) goes **beyond what is necessary to achieve the objective of reducing juvenile fishing mortality and has an excessive socio-economic impact on purse seine and bait boat fisheries, as well as on the vulnerable economies and coastal communities that depend on them.** This closure has contributed to the decrease in BET catches estimated for 2020, but **has already created severe trade impacts and** supply-demand imbalances in the yellowfin and skipjack markets. This situation is untenable for the fishing sector and the local economies where tuna is processed.

Furthermore, Europêche encourages the use of biodegradable FADs, although emphasizes that current trials confirm that well-working biodegradable materials do not exist yet.