

Opening Statement to the Plenary
27th Annual Meeting of ICCAT
November 15-23 2021

Sciaena is thankful for the possibility to attend the 2021 Annual Meeting of ICCAT as an observer. We would like to acknowledge the Secretariat, Chair and CPCs for their continuous work to convene meetings during the year and the 27th regular meeting of the Commission, particularly noteworthy in the context of the Covid-19 health crisis.

It is our belief at Sciaena that the health pandemic has only highlighted the urgency of ensuring resilient marine ecosystems, capable of performing their crucial role in sustaining life on Earth, but also of supporting sustainable economies and thriving coastal communities. Sustainable, science-based and long-term fisheries management is therefore more important than ever before and we encourage ICCAT, and its CPCs in particular, to show decisive leadership in this year's meeting in order to reach positive decisions in this regard.

While there are several important issues that will be discussed and many opportunities to adopt strong and urgent measures, Sciaena would like to call your attention to a set of vital decisions that must be made.

On tropical tunas, we are pleased that the bigeye tuna stock is showing signs of recovery and we hope that this is the result of improvements to the FAD fishery. Nevertheless, we hope that in this annual meeting ICCAT adopts a TAC for this stock that follows the SCRS advice for sustainable catches but also takes positive steps in order to reach an agreement on the allocation key. While it is a complicated discussion, we believe it is key to ensure that total catches do not go over sustainable levels and to ensure sustainable management of bigeye in the future. We are confident that CPCs will be able to define a new allocation key that takes into account historical catches and also the aspirations of developing countries, but also criteria such as reducing juvenile mortality and other factors that have negative impacts on the stock and the ecosystem it depends on.

Additionally, we would like to stress that the three species of tropical tunas are closely connected and that any long-term management should have this connectivity in sight. In this regard, it is with concern that we see the situation of yellowfin tuna, a stock for which ICCAT currently adopts a catch level but no allocation key, which resulted in landing of 40.000 tonnes above the TAC advice in 2020. Therefore, it is crucial that YFT management is prioritized in the near future in order to ensure catch levels are respected going forward.



Finally, we hope that positive steps are made and language is adopted that ensures that the Management Procedures for the multi-species complex of bigeye, yellowfin and skipjack in the eastern Atlantic is adopted by 2024, in line with the current MSE roadmap.

Even more concerning is the situation of shortfin mako, for which the SCRS has repeatedly recommended the adoption of a total retention ban without exceptions, combined with by-catch mitigation measures. While the SCRS Kobe matrices indicate that overfishing would end at a 500t mortality level, it has been repeatedly confirmed that all sources of mortality would have to be taken into account when reading these tables. As post-release mortality alone is considerable, a continued commercialization of this species is no longer sustainable.

The Panel 4 intersessional meeting of October 27th ended on a note of optimism, and we believe ICCAT is closer than ever to finalize a measure that finally sets shortfin mako on the path to recovery. We urge CPCs to adopt a measure that ensures a full retention ban for the upcoming years but also includes additional conservation measures. Anything less than that will not only determine a very grim outlook for this important shark species, but also raise questions about the true capacity of ICCAT to deliver on its objectives.

We also encourage CPCs to take positive steps in order to adopt a management procedure for Atlantic swordfish in the upcoming years.

Regarding Panel 2, we hope that a Management Procedure for Northern Albacore, is finally adopted. On bluefin, Sciaena expects that CPCs adopt the SCRS recommendation and workplan for 2022 in order to finalize the MSE. In addition, taking into account the link between the two stocks, we call on the CPCs to adopt a precautionary TAC for western bluefin.

Finally, regarding PWG, Sciaena fully supports the joint statement submitted by Oceana, The Pew Charitable Trusts and WWF ([PWG-421](#)) and urge CPCs to adopt proposals [PWG-414](#), [PWG-415](#), [PWG-416](#), as these are essential to enhance the control and monitoring of fishing activities at ICCAT level, by closing existing loopholes that allow IUU to continue. We also strongly encourage CPCs to adopt proposal [PWG-418](#), as Sciaena considers the development of remote electronic monitoring must be a priority for the near future of ICCAT.

In conclusion, we look forward to fruitful discussions and strong decisions by ICCAT and its CPCs in order to demonstrate that the organization is committed to protecting the ecosystems and managing the stocks under its stewardship to the benefit of all humankind.

