
EAC Opening Statement for the 23rd Special Meeting of the ICCAT Commission
November 14-21, 2022

The Ecology Action Centre appreciates the opportunity to participate once again in person as observers in ICCAT's Annual Meeting and we thank the Secretariat for their tremendous effort to organize a hybrid meeting. At this 23rd Special Meeting of the Commission, we call on CPCs to agree on the following measures:

 **Adopt a Management Procedure for Atlantic bluefin tuna**

After many years of work by SCRS and Panel 2 Parties and stakeholders, a Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) for Atlantic bluefin tuna has been completed and endorsed by the SCRS. The remaining candidate Management Procedures (MPs) meet the minimum performance standards for stock status and safety. The EAC urges the Commission to choose a 70% probability for the stock status management objective. Most critically, the Commission should ensure an MP is adopted this year and implement MP-based TACs in both Western and Eastern Atlantic bluefin tuna.

 **Improve management of North and South Atlantic swordfish**

The SCRS has made important strides on developing the MSE for North Atlantic swordfish and Parties should continue to support the next stages with their active participation towards adopting an MP in 2023. The South Atlantic swordfish population is overfished and experiencing overfishing and requires immediate action to reduce the TAC and ensure catches remain at the current rate. In light of the concerning outlook for this population, the EAC urges Parties to also decrease the permitted carry forward and remove the outdated and unsustainable allowance for CPCs to count swordfish catch taken in the South Atlantic against uncaught North Atlantic limits.

 **Maintain retention ban on North Atlantic mako sharks and extend to cover South Atlantic makos**

One year ago, ICCAT at last took important short-term steps to protect exceptionally vulnerable and valuable shortfin makos in the North Atlantic, but fishing on the South Atlantic population continues without a limit in the face of potentially increasing threat. We urge the Commission to adopt a complimentary and precautionary prohibition in the South Atlantic for makos, as proposed by the EU and the UK, to facilitate enforcement and address that population's likely increasing risk.

 **Adopt a fins naturally attached requirement for landed sharks**

ICCAT's ban on shark finning (the wasteful practice of slicing off a shark's fins and discarding the body at sea) relies on a fin-to-carcass ratio limit that is hard to enforce and exacerbates inadequacies in shark catch information. We call on Parties to support adoption of the globally recognized best practice requirement to land all sharks with their fins naturally attached.

Reduce sea turtle bycatch

Sub-Committee on Ecosystems and Bycatch has confirmed that ICCAT fisheries have high annual rates of sea turtle bycatch and the Commission has discussed mitigation options since at least 2013, but has yet to adopt best practice measures shown to reduce their catch. We urge Parties to adopt a requirement for shallow set longline vessels to use circle hooks and/or finfish bait and for purse seiners to avoid encircling sea turtles. All vessels should carry onboard, in good working order and accessible, sea turtle release equipment and have training for crew. The EAC is also pleased to see proposal P4A-803 include a requirement to increase observer coverage to 10% for longline, which would be consistent with the tropical tuna and Eastern bluefin measures.

Strengthen management requirements for Fish Aggregating Devices (FAD)

The SCRS has consistently noted the concerning catch of juvenile bigeye and yellowfin tuna with the use of drifting FADs that is undermining responsible management of these stocks. In the tropical tunas measure, we urge Parties to support a more precautionary limit on total number of FADs allowed per vessel and a continued FAD closure of at least 72 days. The EAC would like to align ourselves with the detailed calls for improved FAD management made by IPLNF in their [opening statement](#).

Increase observer coverage, adopt Electronic Monitoring standards, and Joint Inspection Scheme

Comprehensive observation of catch is critical for ensuring adequate data, independent verification of catch and improved compliance. The EAC urges the Commission to require 100% observer coverage (human and/or electronic) for all industrial ICCAT fisheries, including supporting vessels and all those engaged in at sea transshipment. To that end, it is important that the Commission continue to develop Electronic Monitoring (EM) standards for adoption in 2023. Work on the Standards should not be an excuse to delay the immediate implementation of the agreed to 10% observer coverage level for longline as per Rec. 21-01. To strengthen ICCAT's MCS regime, the EAC also urges Parties to agree to a single, cooperative enforcement scheme that covers the entire Convention area as proposed in PWG 415/2022

Improve compliance with reporting

Poor data reporting continues to impede the ability of SCRS to fulfill some Commission requests and reduce uncertainty in many assessments. It is undermining the full realization of many of the Commission's well intended management objectives across multiple species and recommendations. The EAC hopes the Commission will continue to support Parties in fulfilling their catch reporting, including with methods for estimating dead and live discards. We urge Parties to ensure implementation of Rec 11-15, which prohibits retention of species for Parties out of compliance with reporting. We also call attention to a requirement in a number of recommendations that Parties receive confirmation from SCRS before they can declare that a species is not in their waters, until then full reporting is required.