



Oceana/Keith Ellenbogen

Recommendations to the 23rd Regular Meeting of ICCAT

18-25 November, 2013, Cape Town, South Africa

Overview

The International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) can achieve effective conservation and management of its fisheries, for both target and nontarget species, if decisions are made based on sound precautionary science and take heed of the ecosystem impacts of fishing. To accomplish these goals, ICCAT members must commit to effective implementation of agreed upon Recommendations, monitoring, compliance, and enforcement.

The Pew Charitable Trusts is encouraged that the Commission has taken steps in recent years toward more sustainable management of tunas and sharks, and has improved compliance with existing management measures. But these actions are not yet sufficient to first restore and then guarantee healthy tuna and shark populations across the Atlantic Ocean.

ICCAT members have the opportunity at this 23rd Regular Meeting of the Commission to continue to improve the organization's track record. To do so, members must heed the science when setting catch limits as well as fully address illegal fishing and the unsustainable catch of sharks.

Pew calls on members of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas to take the following critical actions at the 23rd Regular Meeting of the Commission:

- Maintain quotas in line with scientific advice for Atlantic bluefin tuna.
- Adopt conservation and management measures to protect sharks.
- Improve compliance with ICCAT measures.

Recommendations

Maintain quotas in line with scientific advice for Atlantic bluefin tuna

At the 2012 annual meeting, the Commission acted to set both the eastern and western Atlantic bluefin tuna quotas in line with the scientific advice. Increasing the limits for either the eastern or western stocks in 2013 without a new stock assessment or recommendation from the Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS) to justify modifications to either quota would be a clear indication that ICCAT is ignoring precaution and no longer acting in line with scientific advice. Such actions would compromise the integrity of the Commission as well as the future of both eastern and western stocks. The western population of Atlantic bluefin tuna is severely depleted at just 36 percent of its 1970 level, and the SCRS has emphasized the uncertainty in the status of the eastern stock.¹ These factors demand precautionary management of both.

ICCAT should not raise the western quota above 1,750 tonnes, inclusive of any possible scientific research quota, for 2014 and 2015 and should not renegotiate the eastern recommendation (Rec. 2012-03) until after the next assessment.

ICCAT should be commended for launching the electronic bluefin catch documentation (eBCD) system on schedule in May 2013. Only a small number of ICCAT members, however, are currently using the eBCD. That limited usage increases the data entry burden on the ICCAT Secretariat and compromises the ability of the system to minimize illegal fishing and increase the accuracy and timeliness of reporting.

Pew urges ICCAT members to maintain the current March 2014 deadline for transition from the paper bluefin catch document to full utilization of the eBCD system.

Adopt conservation and management measures to protect sharks

The International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List of Threatened Species assessed porbeagle sharks (*Lamna nasus*) as Critically Endangered in the northeast Atlantic and Mediterranean, Endangered in the northwest Atlantic, and Vulnerable globally. In March 2013, porbeagle sharks were included in Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

Because of the porbeagle's poor conservation status in the ICCAT Convention Area and vulnerability to ICCAT fisheries,² the Commission should prohibit the retention of these sharks by fishing vessels and work to ensure successful implementation of the CITES listing.

The "Expanded Ecological Risk Assessment of Pelagic Sharks Caught in Atlantic Pelagic Longline Fisheries," conducted by several members of ICCAT's Shark Species Group, showed that the shortfin mako (*Isurus oxyrinchus*) is one of the most vulnerable sharks to ICCAT fisheries because of its low productivity and high susceptibility to catch, and that the blue shark (*Prionace glauca*) is one of the most susceptible to catch in ICCAT fisheries.³ The catch of blue sharks in the Convention Area has increased significantly from the last full assessment in 2008, from approximately 54,000 tonnes that year to over 70,000 tonnes in 2011.⁴

ICCAT must take action to ensure that populations of shortfin mako and blue sharks are not overfished, by establishing concrete, precautionary, science-based catch limits for these species.

Improve compliance with ICCAT measures

The International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas should continue to enhance compliance with Commission measures by improving the transparency of fishing operations and adopting new measures to combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing.

Specifically:

- ICCAT members should improve the identification of fishing vessels⁵ by requiring that all vessels on the ICCAT Record of Vessels have an International Maritime Organization, or IMO, number by 1 January 2015. This number would be reported in all records and relevant communications involving these vessels, and would be permanently marked in a visible place on the vessels' hulls.
- ICCAT should adopt mandatory forms for prior notification and for port inspection reports to ensure the effective implementation of Recommendation 12-07.
- ICCAT should amend Recommendation 03-14 to increase the frequency of Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) data collection to at least every two hours so the data can be used effectively to track actual vessel movements.

ICCAT Recommendation 2011-15 established a new system under which countries failing to report catch data for a particular species, including sharks, would be prohibited from retaining that species until the data have been received by the ICCAT Secretariat.

The Commission must take compliance action to prohibit the retention of species, especially sharks, by ICCAT members that have not submitted catch data on those species in 2013, until such data are submitted.



Blue shark (*Prionace glauca*)



Per Erik Berg, Stop Illegal Fishing

The owner of the Premier paid \$2 million in fines in 2013 to settle charges related to illegal fishing.

Endnotes

- 1 Standing Committee on Research and Statistics, "Report of the 2012 Atlantic bluefin tuna stock assessment session" (Madrid, Sept. 4-11, 2012), ICCAT Doc. No. SCI-033: 1-124, http://iccat.int/Documents/Meetings/Docs/2012_BFT_ASSESS.pdf.
- 2 E. Cortés et al., "Expanded Ecological Risk Assessment of Pelagic Sharks Caught in Atlantic Pelagic Longline Fisheries," Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (2012), SCRS/2012/167.
- 3 E. Cortés et al., 2012.
- 4 The data are from the ICCAT database: <<http://www.iccat.int/en/accesingdb.htm>>.
- 5 Vessels should include, but not be limited to, vessels 20 meters in length overall or greater, vessels of 100 GT or greater, and vessels operating in waters outside the exclusive economic zone of the vessel's flag State.

For further information, please visit:

pewenvironment.org/ip

Contact: Elizabeth Wilson
Phone: 202-263-9306
Email: ewilson@pewtrusts.org

Facebook: [facebook.com/pewenvironmentgroup](https://www.facebook.com/pewenvironmentgroup)
Twitter: twitter.com/pewenvironment or [@pewenvironment](https://twitter.com/@pewenvironment)
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