



# International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas 2019: A Checklist for This Year's Meeting

Managers must act to conserve tropical tunas and mako sharks and end illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing

## Overview

At its meeting in Palma de Mallorca, Spain, from 18 to 25 November, the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) must adopt precautionary, science-based management procedures and take other overdue measures to ensure the long-term health of the fisheries it oversees.

The Commission, responsible for conserving and managing tunas, sharks, and other highly migratory species in the Atlantic, has a full agenda because inaction in 2018 compressed two years of work into this year's meeting. ICCAT must adopt a precautionary bigeye tuna recovery plan, conserve shortfin mako sharks, effectively manage billfishes, and institute policies to reduce or prevent illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, among other issues.

When ICCAT decided to better protect eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean bluefin by allowing science rather than politics to drive management, that choice was quickly rewarded by evidence of significant population growth and resulting quota increases. The Commission should renew its commitment to this sort of precautionary, science-based management, rather than rolling over ineffective measures and delaying difficult decisions until future meetings.

To fulfil its mandate to protect the species it manages, ICCAT should take the following actions:

## **Adopt management procedures for Atlantic fisheries**

To ensure healthy stocks and productive fisheries, ICCAT should renew its commitment to adopting management procedures, including carefully designed and tested rules that are automatically triggered based on a stock's status. ICCAT has made considerable progress in developing these procedures, also known as harvest strategies, for priority stocks. In accordance with Rec. 15-07, which established a five-year deadline for adopting management procedures for eight stocks, ICCAT adopted its first harvest control rule (HCR) for northern albacore in 2017 and identified management objectives for Atlantic bluefin tuna in 2018. In addition, management strategy evaluation (MSE) exercises are underway for albacore, bluefin, and North Atlantic swordfish.

Although the completion of the bluefin MSE has been delayed until 2021, progress on other priority stocks should continue. ICCAT should continue working on a management procedure for North Atlantic swordfish and begin identifying long-term management objectives for bigeye tuna. The Commission should also adopt short-term recovery plans for overfished species for which the MSE process is not yet underway, particularly for bigeye tuna and for marlins. In Palma de Mallorca, fisheries managers should dedicate adequate funding and time at intersessional meetings for all of the MSE work.

In particular, ICCAT members should:

- Revise Res. 18-03 to formalize management objectives for both bluefin stocks based on deliberations at the Panel 2 intersessional meeting.
- Adopt a bigeye recovery plan that limits the catch from all sources to 50,000 metric tons per year and includes management objectives for the stock.
- Adjust the billfish rebuilding plan to ensure that there is a high probability of recovering both blue and white marlin. This requires limiting catch of white marlin to 400 tons and blue marlin to 1500 tons per year.

## **Follow scientific advice for North Atlantic shortfin mako sharks**

The shortfin mako shark is a long-lived, late-maturing shark and an important pelagic predator. In March, the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List reclassified shortfin makos as Endangered globally. In August, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora agreed to regulate the global trade of shortfin mako sharks. However, the status of the species is such that without effective management measures, sustainable trade might not even be possible. In the North Atlantic, the species is overfished, overfishing continues to occur, and the Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS) determined this year that its status is worse than previously assessed and the necessary reductions in catch will not be achieved under the current management system. SCRS scientists project that even if mortality from fishing is reduced to zero, the population will continue to decline until 2035.

They noted that reducing the fishing mortality for shortfin makos to 300 metric tons or less per year has only a 60 percent probability of recovering the stock within the next 50 years. Moreover, a total allowable catch of 300 metric tons would be difficult to allocate to ICCAT members, especially when dead discards and post-release mortality may add up to that amount.

The Commission has already prohibited retention of other sharks of conservation concern caught in ICCAT fisheries. To give North Atlantic shortfin makos the best chance of recovering, and to ensure that the southern stock does not experience the same rate of decline, ICCAT must:

- Prohibit retention of shortfin mako sharks in all Atlantic fisheries.

## **Ensure all eligible vessels have unique identifying numbers**

IUU fishing worldwide accounts for up to 26 million tons of fish annually, worth up to \$23.5 billion.

International Maritime Organization vessel identification numbers (IMO numbers) are essential in the fight against illegal fishing, by helping to improve monitoring, control, and surveillance of fishing operations.

Rec. 13-13 requires vessels 20 meters long or larger to obtain IMO numbers in order to be added to ICCAT's authorized vessels list, which is required if vessels want to legally fish in the Convention area. Other ICCAT recommendations (e.g., on eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean bluefin and on Mediterranean swordfish) require the provisions of Rec. 13-13 to apply to all ICCAT vessels. Fishing vessels of all hull construction and down to a length of 12 meters are now eligible to obtain IMO numbers and should have already done so. This year, member governments should:

- Ensure that all eligible authorized vessels have an IMO number and have submitted this information to the ICCAT Secretariat.

## **Improve transshipment regulation to ensure a legal and verifiable seafood supply chain**

Current regulatory control and monitoring of transshipment is inadequate within the ICCAT Convention Area, where this activity rose by 44 percent between 2012 and 2018. As transshipments continue to increase, strengthening the verification and transparency of these activities remains critical.

Pew has identified many inconsistencies between data reported by the Regional Observer Program, ICCAT members, and the Secretariat. Additionally, we partnered with Global Fishing Watch to analyze automatic identification system (AIS) data and found discrepancies between detected carrier vessel activity and the activity reported to ICCAT, indicating that unauthorized transshipments involving ICCAT-sourced catch may have occurred in the Convention Area.

To better track transshipment activity and to minimize opportunities for unauthorized transshipment to facilitate the laundering of illegally caught fish through the supply chain, ICCAT must update Rec. 16-15 on transshipment management. The update should:

- Require all vessels involved in transshipments be flagged to an ICCAT Contracting Party, Cooperating non-Contracting Party, or Fishing Entity.
- Mandate that transshipment authorizations and declarations be sent to all relevant authorities, including the Secretariat, in near real time.
- Mandate carrier vessels to notify the Secretariat of their intent to transship ICCAT-managed species upon entering the ICCAT Convention Area and confirm the presence of an ICCAT-certified observer and an operational vessel monitoring system onboard.
- Provide public access to historical ICCAT carrier and fishing vessel transshipment authorization lists.

## **Adopt minimum standards for electronic monitoring**

One-hundred percent observer coverage of all longline operations is needed to ensure that all catches are verifiable and legal and to increase the quality and availability of scientific data for target and bycatch species.

Better longline observer coverage can be achieved by complementing human observers with electronic monitoring (EM) technology. To ensure that EM programs are effective and efficient, ICCAT should direct the SCRS to develop minimum standards and requirements for data collection, sharing, analysis, and reporting, and dedicate funding to build appropriate infrastructure. Once adopted, these standards will ensure EM programs help managers improve data integrity, ensure compliance with regulations, and supplement human observers to reach full coverage. The Commission should:

- Require 100 percent observer coverage, using a combination of human and electronic means, for all longline operations by 2021.
- Direct the SCRS to present a workplan for developing electronic monitoring standards at the 2020 Commission meeting.

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**For further information, please visit:**  
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