



International Seafood Sustainability Foundation/Fabien Forget

ICCAT Must Commit to Rebuilding Stocks and Enacting Fisheries Reforms

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The International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) is responsible for the conservation and management of tunas, sharks, and other highly migratory species in the Atlantic Ocean. At their annual meeting in November, ICCAT members must focus on fulfilling the Commission's mandate and ensuring the sustainability of its valuable fisheries.

The Pew Charitable Trusts calls on members and cooperating non-members at the 21st Special Meeting of ICCAT to take the following critical actions:

End overfishing of Atlantic bigeye tuna and rebuild the highly depleted population.

This year's Atlantic bigeye stock assessment revealed that the population is at just 59 per cent of the sustainable level, in worse shape than when ICCAT first adopted a recovery plan in 2015. That flawed plan was not likely to be successful, and now, recovery has been delayed and the job has been made more difficult. Furthermore, overfishing continues unabated, with 2017 catch exceeding the total allowable catch (TAC) by 21 per cent.

ICCAT must adopt a plan that has at least a 50 per cent probability of immediately ending overfishing and 70 per cent probability of rebuilding the highly depleted population by no later than 2028. To do that, the Commission must lower the TAC to 50,000 metric tons, address the exemptions for minor harvesters to ensure that the actual total does not exceed the TAC, and reduce juvenile mortality associated with the use of fish aggregating devices (FADs) to help restore stock productivity. The recovery timeline must not be extended beyond the original 2028 goal, because doing that would be inappropriate given the life history of bigeye and requirements set forth in Rec. 11-13.

Finalize and adopt amendments to modernize the ICCAT Convention text.

For six years, ICCAT has been developing a set of amendments meant to modernize the Convention text and bring it in line with the conventions of other regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs) around the world. This year, ICCAT must adopt the final recommendations of the working group without delay so that the final amendment package can be signed and the ratification process can proceed.

Advance the management strategy evaluation (MSE) process.

In 2017, ICCAT adopted its first MSE-tested harvest control rule (HCR). To continue this progress and remain on the five-year timeline established in Rec. 15-07, the Commission should strengthen the terms of reference for the Standing Working Group on Dialogue between Fisheries Scientists and Managers to clarify the role, tasks, and organizational structure of the group to increase its efficiency and effectiveness. Similarly, detail should be added to the road map for development of MSE and HCRs to clarify the responsibilities of the different groups and associated timelines for tasks and decision points. Because a management procedure is slated to be set for Atlantic bluefin tuna stocks in 2020, the Commission must also adopt interim management objectives for these stocks.

Maintain robust monitoring and control measures in the eastern bluefin tuna recovery plan.

When revising the non-TAC provisions of Rec. 17-07, the Commission must follow the 2018 advice of the Standing Committee on Research and Statistics and “not [weaken] the current monitoring and control measures” to ensure full recovery of the population and compliance with the TAC.¹ Importantly, fishing and farming capacity limits must be established to remain commensurate with the quota. Furthermore, to prevent excess effort or exceeding the quota, the Commission should maintain current minimum size limits and fishing seasons for pelagic longlines, purse seines, and pelagic trawls, as well as the current bycatch definition that limits bluefin retention to no more than 5 per cent of total catch for vessels not targeting bluefin. Text should also be added to guide the transition to an MSE-tested management procedure in 2020.

Require 100 per cent observer coverage on longline and purse seine vessels.

To ensure that longline and purse seine catches are verifiable and legal, and to increase the quality and availability of scientific data, the Commission should require 100 per cent observer coverage for all longline and purse seine operations and commit to building the infrastructure needed to successfully implement electronic reporting and monitoring.

Increase the transparency of transshipment.

Clear rules for transshipment are essential to ensure a strong, legal and verifiable seafood supply chain and reduce opportunities for illicit activities. Pew calls for a ban on transshipment at sea in the Convention area until the best practices outlined here are implemented.

Rec. 16-15 should be updated to require that carrier vessels be flagged to a contracting ICCAT Party, Cooperating non-Contracting Party, Entity, or Fishing Entity (collectively known as CPCs) in order to be authorized to receive tuna and tuna-like species. Additionally, the Commission should require that all transshipment authorizations and declarations be sent to all relevant authorities in near-real time, mandate that carrier vessels intending to transship notify the Secretariat when entering the Convention area, and ensure that all vessels involved in transshipment are required to carry observers whose duties include providing reports on all transshipments directly to the Secretariat. Finally, transshipped products sourced from ICCAT waters but landed outside the Convention area should be required to be accompanied by transshipment declarations until the first point of sale.

Strengthen port State measures.

Illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing (IUU) remains a threat in ICCAT's management area. To better stop illegally caught fish from reaching the market, Pew encourages the Commission to adopt an amendment to Rec. 12-07 that will improve consistency with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization Port State Measures Agreement, as recommended by the 2nd Independent Performance Review of ICCAT. The work of the Port Inspection Expert Group for Capacity and Assistance should also continue, to assist with the implementation of ICCAT's port State measures.

Improve vessel monitoring systems.

Vessel monitoring systems (VMS) are powerful and commonly used tools to track authorized fishing vessels and to determine whether their activities comply with requirements, such as fishing authorizations or time-area closures. ICCAT should expand VMS requirements across all managed species so procedures are better aligned with those already in place for eastern bluefin tuna.

Implement strong vessel identification rules.

Recommendation 2013-13 requires vessels at least 20 meters in length and all fishing for eastern bluefin tuna to have International Maritime Organization (IMO) numbers. However, implementation gaps remain. All CPCs should ensure full compliance with this requirement.

In December 2017, the IMO expanded eligibility for the unique numbers to all motorized fishing vessels, including wooden vessels, down to 12 meters in length, that are authorized to operate outside waters under the national jurisdiction of a flag State. Pew encourages the Commission to remove the exclusion for wooden vessels from Rec. 2013-13, and to update the Guidelines for Submitting Data and Information Required to require IMO numbers for all eligible vessels.

Adopt conservation and management measures to protect shark species.

ICCAT needs stronger protections for threatened shark species, and all shark catch within the Convention Area must be sustainable. The Commission should apply the precautionary principle in adopting measures to safeguard shark species because population data for these species are often limited. A lack of quality data leads to uncertain or inconclusive assessments.

When it adopted Rec. 17-08 on the shortfin mako shark last year, the Commission did not take the necessary precautionary action to allow for the recovery of this highly depleted stock. The numerous exemptions in this recommendation are likely to undermine both its implementation and effectiveness.² The best available science indicates that retention of shortfin mako should be fully prohibited to help the stock recover. The Commission also should establish concrete, precautionary catch limits to safeguard the blue shark from overfishing.

Conclusion

Although ICCAT continues to make progress toward science-based management through harvest strategy development and the potential advancement of the Convention Amendment, much work needs to be done to ensure healthy fisheries in the Atlantic. By implementing these recommendations, the Commission would take important steps toward complying with its mandate to scientifically and sustainably manage valuable fish stocks.

Endnotes

- 1 International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas, "Report of the Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS) (Madrid, Spain 1 to 5 October 2018)," (2018): https://www.iccat.int/Documents/Meetings/Docs/2018/REPORTS/2018_SCRS_REP_ENG.pdf.
- 2 David W. Sims, Gonzalo Mucientes, and Nuno Queiroz, "Shortfin Mako Sharks Threatened by Inaction," *Science* 359, no. 6382 (2018): 1342, <http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1126/science.aat0315>.

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