

RECOMMENDATION BY ICCAT AMENDING THE SUPPLEMENTAL RECOMMENDATION BY ICCAT CONCERNING THE WESTERN ATLANTIC BLUEFIN TUNA REBUILDING PROGRAM

RECALLING the 1998 *Recommendation by ICCAT to Establish a Rebuilding Program for Western Atlantic Bluefin Tuna* [Rec. 98-07], the *Recommendation by ICCAT Concerning Conservation of Western Atlantic Bluefin Tuna* [Rec. 02-07], the *Recommendation by ICCAT Concerning the Western Atlantic Bluefin Tuna Rebuilding Program and the Conservation and Management Measures for Bluefin Tuna in the Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean* [Rec. 04-05], the *Supplemental Recommendations by ICCAT Concerning the Western Atlantic Bluefin Tuna Rebuilding Program* [Recs. 06-06, 08-04, 10-03, 12-02, and 13-09];

FURTHER RECALLING that the objective of the Convention is to maintain populations at levels that will support maximum sustainable catch (usually referred to as MSY);

CONSIDERING that the 2014 stock assessment resulted in a more optimistic view of stock status with respect to the 2012 assessment, but that the assessment and the projections do not capture the full degree of uncertainty;

NOTING that under the low recruitment scenario the western Atlantic bluefin tuna stock is above the biomass level that can support MSY and is consistent with the Convention objective. Under the high recruitment scenario (under which higher sustainable yields are possible in the future), the stock remains overfished, but is not experiencing overfishing. Regardless of recruitment scenario, the spawning stock biomass has increased by 70 percent since 1998, when the rebuilding program was adopted;

FURTHER CONSIDERING that the Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS) has estimated MSY to be 3,050 t under the low recruitment scenario and 5,316 t under the high recruitment scenario;

ACKNOWLEDGING that the SCRS indicates that the issue of identifying either the high or low recruitment scenario, or an alternative scenario, as being the more realistic remains unresolved;

RECOGNIZING that the SCRS recommends that the next stock assessment be conducted in 2016 to incorporate new data from the research conducted under the Atlantic-wide Bluefin Tuna Research Program (GBYP) and related activities and to utilize new assessment methodologies;

FURTHER RECOGNIZING the value of increasing biological sampling to provide additional support toward addressing some key stock assessment uncertainties;

FURTHER ACKNOWLEDGING the need to re-evaluate the western Atlantic bluefin tuna rebuilding program no later than 2016 in light of the 2016 stock assessment results and resulting advice from SCRS;

UNDERSCORING that the SCRS indicates that the strong 2002/2003 year classes and recent reduction in fishing mortality have contributed to a more rapid increase in spawning stock biomass in recent years;

UNDERSCORING FURTHER that SCRS has advised that further increases in spawning stock biomass will increase the ability to discriminate between alternative recruitment hypotheses;

RECOGNIZING that the SCRS noted the uncertainties associated with existing CPUE fishery dependent indices, and suggested that using a scientific research quota within a TAC that is consistent with scientific advice may help support the improvement of stock abundance indices, including fishery independent indices, for western Atlantic bluefin tuna and overcome this situation;

FURTHER ACKNOWLEDGING that management actions taken in the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean are likely to affect recovery in the western Atlantic, given that the productivity of the western Atlantic bluefin tuna fisheries is linked to the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean stock;

FURTHER RECOGNIZING the *ICCAT Criteria for the Allocation of Fishing Possibilities* [Ref. 01-25];

RENEWING the commitment to the full implementation of existing mandatory reporting obligations including those in the *Recommendation by ICCAT Concerning the Recording of Catch by Fishing Vessels in the ICCAT Convention Area* [Rec. 03-13];

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE CONSERVATION
OF ATLANTIC TUNAS (ICCAT) RECOMMENDS THAT:

1. Contracting Parties and Cooperating non-Contracting Parties, Entities and Fishing Entities (CPCs) whose vessels have been actively fishing for bluefin tuna in the western Atlantic will continue the 20-year rebuilding program that began in 1999 and continues through 2018.

Effort and capacity limits

2. In order to avoid increasing fishing mortality of bluefin tuna in the eastern or western Atlantic, CPCs will continue to take measures to prohibit any transfer of fishing effort from the western Atlantic to the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean and from the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean to the western Atlantic.

TACs, TAC allocations, and catch limits

3. The rebuilding program for bluefin tuna in the western Atlantic will have a TAC, inclusive of dead discards, of 2,000 t in each of 2015 and 2016.
4. The annual TAC, MSY target, and the 20-year rebuilding period shall be reviewed and, if appropriate, adjusted based upon subsequent SCRS advice. No adjustment to the annual TAC or the 20-year rebuilding period shall be considered unless SCRS advice indicates that the TAC under consideration will allow the MSY target to be achieved within the rebuilding period with a 50 percent or greater probability.
5. If the SCRS detects a serious threat of stock collapse, the Commission shall suspend all bluefin tuna fisheries in the western Atlantic for the following year.
6. The allocation of the annual TAC, inclusive of dead discards, will be indicated as follows:
 - a) The annual TAC shall include the following allocations:

| <i>CPC</i> | <i>Allocation</i> |
|---|-------------------|
| USA (by-catch related to longline fisheries in vicinity of management area boundary) | 25 t |
| Canada (by-catch related to longline fisheries in vicinity of management area boundary) | 15 t |

- b) After subtracting the amounts under paragraph 6(a), the remainder of the annual TAC will be allocated as follows:

| CPC | <i>If the remainder of the annual TAC is:</i> | | | |
|--|---|------------------------|--|----------------------------|
| | <2,413 t (A) | 2,413 t (B) | >2,413-2,660 t (C) | >2,660 t (D) |
| United States | 54.02% | 1,303 t | 1,303 t | 49.00% |
| Canada | 22.32% | 539 t | 539 t | 20.24% |
| Japan | 17.64% | 426 t | 426 t + all increase between 2,413 t and 2,660 t | 24.74% |
| United Kingdom (in respect of Bermuda) | 0.23% | 5.5 t | 5.5 t | 0.23% |
| France (in respect of St. Pierre & Miquelon) | 0.23% | 5.5 t | 5.5 t | 0.23% |
| Mexico | 5.56% | 134 t | 134 t | 5.56% |

- c) Consistent with paragraphs 1, 3, and 6(b), the TAC for each of 2015 and 2016 results in the following CPC-specific quota allocations (not including by-catch allowances listed in 6(a)):

| TAC (for each of 2015 and 2016) | 2,000 t |
|--|------------|
| United States | 1,058.79 t |
| Canada | 437.47 t |
| Japan | 345.74 t |
| United Kingdom (in respect of Bermuda) | 4.51 t |
| France (in respect of St. Pierre & Miquelon) | 4.51 t |
| Mexico | 108.98 t |

In no case shall the allocation to France (in respect of St. Pierre & Miquelon) and to the United Kingdom (in respect of Bermuda) be less than 4 t each in any single year unless the fishery is closed.

- d) Depending on availability, Mexico can transfer up to 108.98 t of its adjusted quota in each of 2015 and 2016 to Canada to support cooperative research as specified in paragraph 20.
- e) Depending on availability, the United Kingdom (in respect of Bermuda) can transfer up to the amount of its adjusted quota in each of 2015 and 2016 to the United States to support cooperative research as specified in paragraph 20.
- f) Depending on availability, France (in respect of St. Pierre & Miquelon) can transfer up to the amount of its adjusted quota in each of 2015 and 2016 to Canada to support cooperative research as specified in paragraph 20.
- g) CPCs planning to engage in the cooperative research activities specified in paragraphs 6(d), 6(e), and 6(f) above shall: notify the Commission and the SCRS of the details of their research programs to be undertaken before they commence, and present the results of the research to the SCRS.
7. A CPC's total quota shall include its allocations in paragraph 6, adjusted for underharvest or overharvest consistent with the remainder of this paragraph. Each year shall be considered as an independent management period for the remainder of this paragraph.
- a) Any underharvest of a CPC's total quota in a given year may be carried forward to the next year. However, in no event shall the underharvest that is carried forward exceed 10% of the CPC's initial quota allocation under paragraph 6, with the exception of UK (in respect of Bermuda), France (in respect of St. Pierre and Miquelon), and Mexico (i.e., those with initial allocations of 115 t or less), for which the underharvest that is carried forward shall in no event exceed 100% of the initial allocation under paragraph 6 (i.e., the total quota for such CPC shall not exceed twice its annual quota in any given year).
- b) If, in the applicable management period, and each subsequent management period, any CPC has an overharvest of its total quota, its initial quota for the next subsequent management period will be reduced by 100% of the excess of such total quota, and ICCAT may authorize other appropriate actions.
- c) Notwithstanding paragraph 7(b), if a CPC has an overharvest of its total quota during any two consecutive management periods, the Commission will recommend appropriate measures, which may include, but are not limited to, reduction in the CPC's total quota equal to a minimum of 125% of the overharvest amount and, if necessary, trade restrictive measures. Any trade measures under this paragraph will be import restrictions on the subject species and consistent with each CPC's international obligations. The trade measures will be of such duration and under such conditions as the Commission may determine.

Minimum fish size requirements and protection of small fish

8. CPCs will prohibit the taking and landing of western Atlantic bluefin tuna weighing less than 30 kg or, in the alternative, having a fork length of less than 115 cm.
9. Notwithstanding the above measures, CPCs may grant tolerances to capture western Atlantic bluefin tuna either weighing less than 30 kg, or in the alternative, having a fork length of less than 115 cm, provided they limit the take of these fish so that the average over the 2015 and 2016 fishing periods is no more than 10% by weight of the total bluefin tuna quota for each CPC, and institute measures to deny economic gain to the fishermen from such fish. CPCs granting such a tolerance will prohibit the taking and landing of western Atlantic bluefin tuna having a fork length of less than 67 cm, except as the subject of a research project notified to SCRS, developed taking into consideration the recommended research priorities of the SCRS, and conducted by individuals duly permitted by the CPC to undertake such research.
10. CPCs shall prohibit fishermen from selling or offering for sale recreationally harvested fish of any size.
11. CPCs will encourage their commercial and recreational fishermen to tag and release all fish less than 30 kg or, in the alternative, having a fork length less than 115 cm and report on steps taken in this regard in their Annual Report.

Area and time restrictions

12. There shall be no directed fishery on the bluefin tuna spawning stock in the western Atlantic spawning grounds (i.e., the Gulf of Mexico). In light of advice received from SCRS pursuant to paragraph 23, the Commission shall review this measure and consider the need for alternative management actions.

Transshipment

13. Transshipment at-sea shall be prohibited.

Scientific research and data and reporting requirements

14. In 2016, and thereafter every three years, the SCRS will conduct a stock assessment for bluefin tuna for the western Atlantic stock and for the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean stock and provide advice to the Commission on the appropriate management measures, approaches, and strategies, including, *inter alia*, regarding TAC levels for those stocks for future years.
15. The SCRS shall prepare and present a Kobe II strategy matrix reflecting recovery scenarios of western Atlantic bluefin tuna consistent with *Resolution by ICCAT to Standardize the Presentation of Scientific Information in the SCRS Annual Report and in Working Group Detail Reports* [Res. 11-14].
16. Canada, the United States, Japan, Mexico, and, as appropriate, other CPCs harvesting western Atlantic bluefin tuna shall collaborate in the improvement of existing indices of abundance and the development of new combined indices. To advance this work, SCRS should review the current stock abundance indices for western Atlantic bluefin tuna at its 2015 data preparatory meeting, as well as analysis of any relevant non-aggregated catch and effort data that can be provided, consistent with domestic confidentiality requirements.
17. The SCRS shall annually review available fishery and stock indicators and evaluate whether they warrant advancing the scheduling of the next stock assessment. In support of this evaluation, CPCs shall make special efforts to update abundance indices and other fishery indicators annually and provide them in advance of the SCRS annual species group meetings.

18. In preparation for the 2016 stock assessment, the SCRS should thoroughly review the evidence that initially was used in support of each recruitment scenario as well as any additional information available that might also support alternative scenarios as a means of informing the Commission on which recruitment scenario is more likely to reflect the current stock recruitment potential. If the SCRS is unable to support one scenario over the other, the SCRS then should provide the Commission with management advice that takes into consideration the risks (e.g., risk of not achieving the Convention objective, lost yield) that would be associated with opting to manage the stock under a scenario that does not accurately reflect the stock-recruit relationship.
19. If scientific evidence results in an SCRS recommendation to alter the definition of management units, or to take explicit account of mixing between management units, then the western Atlantic rebuilding program shall be re-evaluated.
20. CPCs that harvest western Atlantic bluefin tuna should contribute to the research being undertaken through ICCAT's GBYP. At the 2015 Bluefin Tuna Data Preparatory meeting, the SCRS will (a) identify existing fisheries for which biological sampling rates should be increased, (b) identify any fisheries for which improvements in the collection and/or provision of catch, effort, and/or size data are necessary to support the stock assessment, and (c) provide guidance on enhancing efforts to cover any deficiencies identified in (a) and (b) above. CPCs should make special efforts to enhance biological sampling activities in these fisheries beginning in the 2015 bluefin tuna fishing seasons. Complementary information will also be required for the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean stock in order to more fully evaluate the effects of mixing. In addition, it is also important to enhance, and where needed develop, an accurate abundance index for juvenile fish. CPCs should also make special efforts to ensure complete and timely submission of any collected data to the SCRS.
21. All CPCs shall monitor and report on all sources of fishing mortality, including dead discards, and shall minimize dead discards to the extent practicable.
22. Each CPC shall ensure that its fishing vessels landing bluefin tuna are subject to a data recording system, in accordance with the *Recommendation by ICCAT Concerning the Recording of Catch by Fishing Vessels in the ICCAT Convention Area* [Rec. 03-13].
23. As part of the 2016 stock assessment, the SCRS shall review new available information related to the identification of specific spawning times and areas of bluefin tuna within the western Atlantic Ocean, including from those CPCs that harvest western Atlantic bluefin tuna, and advise the Commission on the results of this review for its consideration. Concerned CPCs are encouraged to work through the SCRS to develop advice for managing any identified times and areas under a precautionary approach.
24. Each CPC shall report its provisional monthly catches of bluefin tuna. This report shall be sent to the ICCAT Secretariat within 30 days of the end of the calendar month in which the catches were made.
25. The ICCAT Secretariat shall, within 10 days following the monthly deadline for receipt of the provisional catch statistics, collect the information received and circulate it to CPCs together with aggregated catch statistics.
26. All CPCs shall provide the best available data for the assessment of the stock by the SCRS, including information on the catches of the broadest range of all age classes encountered in their fisheries, consistent with minimum size restrictions.
27. SCRS should provide guidance on a range of fish size management measures for western Atlantic bluefin tuna and their impact on yield per recruit and spawner per recruit considerations. The SCRS should also comment on the effect of fish size management measures on their ability to monitor stock status.
28. This Recommendation replaces the *Supplemental Recommendation by ICCAT Concerning the Western Atlantic Rebuilding Program* [Rec. 13-09].