

**RECOMMENDATION BY ICCAT FOR AN INTERIM CONSERVATION  
AND MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR WESTERN ATLANTIC BLUEFIN TUNA**

(Entered into force **11 June 2018**)

*RECALLING* the 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), and the Supplemental Recommendations by ICCAT Concerning the Western Atlantic Bluefin Tuna Rebuilding Program (Recs. 06-06, 08-04, 10-03, 12-02, 13-09, 14-05, and 16-08);

*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);

*NOTING* the Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS) conducted a stock assessment in 2017, and estimated that the biomass of the western stock of bluefin tuna has been increasing since about 2004, after two decades of stability, and in 2015 was at 69% of the 1974 biomass level under one model and 45% of the 1974 level under another;

*RECOGNIZING*, however, that the SCRS was unable to provide reliable biomass reference points in line with the provisions of Rec. 16-08 and could not evaluate if the stock is rebuilt to  $B_{MSY}$  under the 20-year rebuilding program that ends in 2018, because it has been unable to resolve the long-term recruitment potential;

*NOTING* that, in light of the longstanding uncertainty in estimating future recruitment, the SCRS in the 2017 stock assessment has provided short-term management advice based on a fishing mortality rate (i.e.  $F_{0.1}$ ) that the SCRS considers to be a reasonable proxy for  $F_{MSY}$ ;

*ALSO NOTING* that the  $F_{0.1}$  strategy accounts for the effect of recruitment changes on stock biomass;

*RECOGNIZING* that although the SCRS provided advice for the 2018-2020 management period based on an  $F_{0.1}$  strategy, the SCRS indicated that fishing consistently at  $F_{0.1}$  would, over the long-term, cause the stock to fluctuate around a biomass level associated with that fishing mortality rate (i.e.,  $B_{0.1}$ ), whatever the future recruitment potential;

*ACKNOWLEDGING* that the value of  $F_{0.1}$  can be higher or lower than  $F_{MSY}$  depending on the stock-recruitment relationship and, consequently, the yields associated with  $F_{0.1}$  can be higher or lower than MSY-based yields;

*NOTING* that the SCRS has advised that constant annual catches during 2018-2020 should not be greater than 2,500 t to have a 50% or greater chance of avoiding overfishing and would need to be 1,000 t or less to allow the stock biomass to continue to grow, and also aware that the Kobe matrix shows that 2,500 t has a 65% probability of avoiding overfishing in 2020;

*UNDERSCORING* that the results of the 2017 stock assessment and projections, including the Kobe matrix, do not capture the full degree of uncertainty with regard to the spawner-recruit relationship as well as other aspects, including the effects of stock mixing;

*AWARE* that the effects of stock mixing and the management actions taken in the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean are likely to affect the western Atlantic stock, given that the productivity of the western Atlantic bluefin tuna fisheries is linked to the much larger eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean stock;

*CONCERNED* as well that the SCRS has indicated that recruitment has been declining for a number of years, and there are no signs of a strong year class coming into the fishery;

*DESIRING*, in light of the identified unquantified uncertainties, to ensure high probability of avoiding overfishing;

*ALSO DESIRING* to avoid large fluctuations in catches into the future to the extent possible;

*RECOGNIZING* that the SCRS recommended that the next stock assessment be conducted in 2020;

*HIGHLIGHTING* the value of research on the stock, including increased biological sampling, to provide additional support toward addressing some key stock assessment uncertainties;

*UNDERSTANDING* that the Commission intends to complete a Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) for western Atlantic bluefin tuna by 2020;

*ANTICIPATING* a transition to the use of management procedures, which the Commission has recommended for bluefin tuna and other priority stocks to manage fisheries more effectively in the face of identified uncertainties, and the need to identify management objectives consistent with the Convention and Recs. 11-13 and 15-07;

*NEEDING*, therefore, to implement an interim conservation and management plan that takes into account the recent SCRS advice as a means to support such a transition to a management approach based on management procedures and incorporating the relevant provisions of the *Recommendation by ICCAT Amending the Supplemental Recommendation by ICCAT Concerning the Western Atlantic Bluefin Tuna Rebuilding Program* (Rec. 16-08);

*RECOGNIZING* the *Resolution by ICCAT on Criteria for the Allocation of Fishing Possibilities* (Res. 15-13);

*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<sup>1</sup>);

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 shall implement the following interim conservation and management plan for the 2018-2020 period, when a management procedure tested through MSE is to be adopted.

***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. Pending the results of the next (i.e., 2020) stock assessment and/or SCRS recommendations based on the MSE process, the following annual total allowable catch (TAC), inclusive of dead discards, of 2,350 t is established for each of 2018, 2019, and 2020.
4. The annual TACs in Paragraph 3 shall be reviewed annually by the Commission on the advice of the SCRS, which would include the review of updated fishery indicators. In support of this work, CPCs shall make special efforts to update abundance indices and other fishery indicators annually and provide them to the SCRS.

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<sup>1</sup> As amended by Rec. 21-14.

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. The Commission will review this provision in light of the development of management procedures (as described in Paragraphs 14 through 16) for this stock.
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:

<i>CPC</i>	<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 TACs for 2018, 2019, and 2020 result in the following CPC-specific quota allocations (not including by-catch allowances listed in 6(a)):

*TAC for each of 2018, 2019, and 2020: 2,350 t*

United States	1,247.86 t
Canada	515.59 t
Japan	407.48 t
United Kingdom (in respect of Bermuda)	5.31 t
France (in respect of St. Pierre & Miquelon)	5.31 t
Mexico	128.44 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 128.44 t of its adjusted quota in each of 2018, 2019, and 2020 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 2018, 2019, and 2020 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 2018, 2019, and 2020 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 130 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 to 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. Any overharvest of such tolerance limit from one year must be subtracted from the tolerance limit applicable in the next year or the year after that. 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 the 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 the SCRS pursuant to paragraph 23, the Commission shall consider revising this measure and the need for alternative management actions, taking into account the efforts of Mexico and other CPCs to conserve western Atlantic bluefin tuna, including reducing bycatch.

### ***Transshipment***

13. Transshipment at-sea shall be prohibited.

### ***Development of Management Procedures/Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE)***

14. Through the Standing Working Group on Dialogue between Fisheries Scientists and Managers (SWGSM) and Panel 2 dialogue process, management objectives and associated performance statistics that reflect the Convention objectives shall be developed for use in a MSE by the SCRS.
15. In 2018, the SCRS shall identify candidate harvest control rules (HCR) (including biomass and fishing mortality-based reference points), and initiate testing of the associated management procedures with respect to the management objectives identified pursuant to Paragraph 14. The results of these analyses shall be discussed intersessionally in 2018 and 2019 through the SWGSM and Panel 2, in order to identify the candidate management procedures for further analysis.
16. In 2019, the SCRS shall refine the MSE and continue testing the candidate management procedures. On this basis, in 2020, the Commission shall review the candidate management procedures and select one for adoption and implementation, including pre-agreed management actions to be taken under various stock conditions.

### ***Scientific research and data and reporting requirements***

17. In 2020, 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.
18. By 2020, the SCRS shall provide the Commission with advice on any potential impacts due to uncertainties (including regarding the spawner-recruit relationship) of implementing an  $F_{0.1}$  strategy, and, for any identified risks, advise how they could be addressed in future management decisions.
19. Canada, the United States, Japan, Mexico, and, as appropriate, other CPCs harvesting western Atlantic bluefin tuna shall continue to collaborate in the improvement of existing indices of abundance and the development of new combined indices.
20. CPCs that harvest Atlantic bluefin tuna should contribute to the research, including that being undertaken through ICCAT's GBYP. CPCs should make or continue special efforts to enhance the collection and analysis of biological samples from Atlantic bluefin tuna fisheries, such as through sample contributions to the coordinated sampling plan recommended by the SCRS. The SCRS will report to the Commission by 2020 on these efforts. In addition, it is important to continue to explore sampling and/or other approaches for enhancing, and where needed developing, accurate abundance indices for juvenile bluefin tuna. 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. Further to Paragraph 12, the SCRS shall review any 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 specific areas under a precautionary approach. In addition, the SCRS shall advise on the efficacy of the Gulf of Mexico directed fishery restriction to reduce mortality of spawning age bluefin tuna.
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 *Recommendation by ICCAT Amending the Supplemental Recommendation by ICCAT Concerning the Western Atlantic Bluefin Tuna Rebuilding Program* (Rec. 16-08).