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CONSIDERATION OF A CATCH CERTIFICATION SYSTEM

An issue which is receiving increasing attention in regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs) and FAO is the matter of establishing mechanisms to track catches of certain fish stocks on a worldwide basis. The development of harmonized catch certification and catch documentation programs among the various RFMOs was the subject of an FAO expert consultation held in January 2002.

Several RFMOs have developed catch certification schemes as a way for national authorities to verify and validate catches. Generally, the objective of catch certificates is to identify the origins of catches, by flag of the fishing vessel, area, date and other associated information, and track them in the market. In some certification programs, a national authority validates catches only if it is confirmed that they were made legally. The catch certificate, or its copies, then accompany the product all the way through the process of unloading, transshipment, processing, export, and wholesale and retail markets until the final product is sold to consumers in any form.

The International Commission for Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) and the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT) have systems of Statistical Documents, which document imports and exports of certain kinds of fish.

The ICCAT has such systems for bluefin tuna ([Appendix](#)), bigeye tuna (caught by methods other than purse-seine or pole-and-line) and swordfish, whose primary objective is to track the international trade in these species. The (IOTC) has a similar system for bigeye tuna taken by methods other than purse-seine and pole-and-line, and the CCSBT has a system for southern bluefin tuna. The ICCAT Statistical Document system for bluefin has been in place for several years and has proved an effective tool for detecting possible IUU fishing patterns and for estimating unreported catches of bluefin in the Atlantic Ocean.

The ICCAT and IOTC schemes, each of which covers the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans, are similar, but differ in several small but important points. They require that any exports to any member of the relevant Commission of the species covered by the respective schemes must be accompanied by a statistical document, validated by the flag government of the vessel which caught the fish, which provides information on the vessel and the area in which the fish was caught. Members of those Commissions are required to provide the Secretary of the Commission with an annual report of the data collected, and these reports are sent to all members.

In July 2001 the Executive Secretary of ICCAT wrote asking if the IATTC would be willing to collaborate with ICCAT and other tuna RFMOs in establishing a mechanism that would cover all oceans. The responses from IATTC members indicated that most of them would be prepared in principle to cooperate with ICCAT on this matter, but would need to consider the details and specifics carefully.

It would not be practical to simply copy the ICCAT and IOTC systems for use in the eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO). In particular, neither of the other two Commissions divide the Pacific. If the IATTC did establish a similar system for the EPO, it would be advisable to develop a harmonized system that could use the same forms as the other Commissions.

A Statistical Document system for some of the tuna species in the EPO would be a useful means of obtaining data for vessels that do not otherwise provide data, and the staff recommends that the Director be asked to pursue the idea of collaborating with FAO and other RFMOs with the objective of designing a harmonized system which could be considered at a future meeting of the IATTC.