

INTER-AMERICAN TROPICAL TUNA COMMISSION
COMISIÓN INTERAMERICANA DEL ATÚN TROPICAL

PERMANENT WORKING GROUP ON COMPLIANCE

4TH MEETING

ANTIGUA (GUATEMALA)
20 JUNE 2003

CHAIR'S REPORT

Chair: David Hogan (United States)

The Working Group convened, and after the approval of the substitute chair, reviewed and approved the agenda with one addition under Item 5.

The staff reviewed the relevant compliance resolutions, which can be found in Document COM-4-00. Following was a presentation of compliance with the resolutions.

The first resolution reviewed was the resolution on bycatch, and the staff first reviewed the compliance with the sea turtle provisions, noting that there has been a decrease in the overall number of violations of the resolution. However, there remain some specific problems that should be improved. For example, of the 1000 turtles involved in 842 sets in 2002, 911 were released unharmed or escaped, but 22 were passed through the power block, identified as a preventable action by the staff.

It was noted that the document did not contain information from national observer programs, and the members agreed that it would be preferable to include such information into future reports. There was also a discussion of the level of data available from longline fisheries.

The staff proposed an adjustment of the bycatch resolution to (1) require the release of sea turtles entangled in FADs and (2) prohibit the use of webbing in FADs. After some discussion, the Working Group agreed that the adjustment should be referred to the Working Group on Bycatch for further consideration, and members indicated that other issues, such as information collection, mitigation measures, and longline interaction should also be discussed at the next meeting of that working group.

The staff presented compliance information on the release of sharks, noting that the few instances of live sharks reaching deck presented handling problems, and the Working Group agreed that measures to address this issue might be addressed in the Working Group on Bycatch. The staff also brought to the attention of the Working Group the issue of direct fishing for sharks by some vessel crews.

The staff presented the compliance information with the full retention requirements, indicating that the levels of compliance were inconclusive in terms of the conservation benefit to the fishery of this measure

The staff informed the Working Group that there were no reported violations of the prohibition on transshipment or the use of tender vessels.

The staff reported on the violation of the yellowfin and bigeye tuna conservation resolution, noting that there were 4 vessels under the jurisdiction of Colombia and 4 vessels under the jurisdiction of Bolivia that continued to fish during the entire period of the closure. The Working Group discussed the nature of the violation, agreeing that it was an extremely serious problem, especially in light of the letter received from the Government of Colombia stating that it chose not to implement the provisions of the IATTC resolution in its national regulations. The staff indicated that no explanation or response to the Secretariat's communications on the matter had been received from Bolivia. The Working Group agreed to present to the Commission the full range of actions that might be taken to address these violations and deter similar violations in the future, including multilateral and bilateral communications, refusal to accept tuna landed from vessels violating the conservation resolution, and removal or suspension of such vessels from the Regional Vessel Register.

On Agenda item 5, the Working Group heard from some members regarding possible infractions in 2002 identified from national observer programs or landings, and the delegation of Mexico requested that the method of reporting this type of information to the staff be standardized. Venezuela reviewed their written submission on this agenda item, and other members provided brief verbal reports. The Working Group also briefly discussed actions taken by Parties on staff reports of infractions committed in 2001.

Japan presented a paper per their request to add an item to agenda item 5 concerning information they had developed regarding a reported increase in the production of “super purse-seiners” and the effect this type of vessel/level of effort may have on total catches in the eastern Pacific. Japan noted the implications of this issue for some of the Parties, including Vanuatu and the U.S. The unconfirmed nature of some of the information in the paper (characterized as such in the paper and during the presentation) was discussed, and it was noted that any unconfirmed reports should be verified as soon as possible.

Agenda item 6 concerned at-sea reporting, and the staff continued with the presentation of the last item in Document COM-4-00, noting that the rate of weekly reports received remains at 51%. There was a brief discussion of the problems that might contribute to this issue, and some Parties noted that this is an issue that does not seem to improve over time. The staff introduced a draft resolution to transfer the responsibility of sending the weekly report to the captain of the vessel, while the observer is still responsible for producing it.

Recommendations to the Commission:

1. That the Working Group on Bycatch be convened as soon as possible, and that among its work items it consider the draft adjustments to the Bycatch Resolution concerning the entanglement of sea turtles in FADs, handling methods for sharks, and issues regarding longline bycatch.
2. That the Commission consider all available options for addressing the failure of the Colombian and Bolivian vessels to observe the December 2002 closure.
3. That the Commission consider the draft resolution on at-sea reporting, and that it also consider communicating to the Parties to the AIDCP in support of a similar measure under that Agreement.
4. That the Commission consider taking actions to address the capacity problem raised by Japan, including writing to the interim Secretariat of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission.