

INTER-AMERICAN TROPICAL TUNA COMMISSION

WORKING GROUP ON BYCATCH

7<sup>TH</sup> MEETING

La Jolla, California (USA)

5-6 May 2017

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

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The 7<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Working Group on Bycatch was held in La Jolla, California on May 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>, 2017. The attendees are listed in Appendix 1.

### **1. Opening of the meeting**

The meeting was opened by the Chairman of the Working Group, Dr. Luis Fleischer, of Mexico. Mrs. Yesenia Chumbe, of Peru, was appointed as rapporteur.

### **2. Adoption of the agenda**

The provisional agenda was adopted with Guatemala’s request to make a presentation on its sea turtle protection program.

### **3. General report on bycatch in the EPO (*IATTC staff*)**

Dr, Martin Hall, from the IATTC staff, presented a report on bycatch in the EPO focusing on sea turtles. Following this presentation, the ensuing debate focused mainly on the use of circle hooks and non-entangling FADs, and on the work in longline fisheries to protect sea turtles.

Regarding circle hooks, several participants stated that the cost of fish has contributed to the use of this kind of hook since the quality of the fish is higher, which encourages fishers to use them; their use has yielded good results and, in some countries, they are widely used. It was mentioned that, in Mexico, circle hooks were tested years ago; turtle bycatch was reduced, but billfish bycatch increased, so the country decided to use a combination of different types of hooks. The issue of fishers training—which should be continuous and permanent—was emphasized.

Regarding the use of non-entangling FADs in replacement of entangling FADs, it was agreed that it is very clear that progress should be made toward the widespread use of non-entangling FADs, as well as in preference of the use of the so-called “sausage” net, which contributes to the prevention of turtle entanglement.

Regarding the work done in longline fisheries for the protection of sea turtles, it was pointed out that the level of sampling with observers is 5%, which is very limited to know what really is happening in that fishery. Moreover, it was emphasized that more work should be done in terms of fishers training in the large longliners, since the work done is ten years old. The Secretariat recalled that, in order to work on a specific issue, the Members of the IATTC must request it because every initiative must be accompanied by financial resources that enable its implementation.

It was proposed to issue a recommendation on the increase of observer coverage in longline vessels and on the importance of having the raw data as collected by them and not a summarized report only. The IATTC scientific staff informed that this issue would be discussed in depth during the SAC meeting.

#### 4. Sea turtles:

##### a) Report on the situation of sea turtles in the EPO, including bycatch and interactions:

##### i. Presentation by Members of an overview of sea turtle bycatch and interactions in their fisheries

Mr. Ricardo Belmontes, from the IATTC staff, presented information related to Resolution [C-07-03](#), which states on its second paragraph that CPCs are required to: “*Beginning in 2008, report to the IATTC annually by 30 June on the progress of implementation of the FAO Guidelines, including information collected on interactions with sea turtles in fisheries managed under the Convention.*” He mentioned that only 11 CPCs have submitted their report, and he stressed the need of having a format that would enable the standardization of the information, which could be useful for the Working Group and the SAC. He concluded by mentioning that the various resolutions of the IATTC generally include the requirements of the FAO Action Plan.

Some participants reaffirmed the importance of having standardized data in the reports submitted by the countries; it was also clarified that the use of turtle excluder devices is a matter for other organizations, not the IATTC. One participant mentioned that there is a very good report from Portugal on the IATTC website that could be used as a basis for these reports.

Mr. Carlos Tejeda, of Guatemala, made a presentation that can be found on the following website: [TEDs and sea turtle bycatch management](#). He mentioned that the Guatemalan Directorate of Fisheries and Aquaculture Regulations (DIPESCA) has joined forces with the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles (IAC), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and Guatemala’s National Council of Protected Areas (CONAP) to conserve, protect and recover sea turtle stocks by involving the fisheries sector in the practice of responsible fishing.

##### ii. Updated report by the *pro tempore* Secretariat of the Inter-American Convention (IAC) for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles (*Verónica Cáceres; Jeffrey Seminoff*)

Dr. Verónica Cáceres and Dr. Jeffrey Seminoff, of the IAC Secretariat, made a presentation on the work carried out within the framework of the IAC for the protection of sea turtles, which can be found at the following website: [Conservation status and habitat use of sea turtles in the Eastern Pacific Ocean](#). It was highlighted that one of the objectives of the IAC is “*to facilitate cooperation between the IATTC and the IAC in order to enhance the conservation of sea turtles in the Eastern Pacific Ocean and reduce incidental by-catch of sea turtle species by IATTC vessels.*”

They made a series of recommendations, of which the Working Group highlighted the following four as potential areas of collaboration between the IATTC and the IAC, duly reviewed by the SAC.

- Establish a permanent bycatch working group composed of members of the IATTC Scientific Advisory Committee, the IAC Scientific Committee, and relevant experts. The functions of this working group should include (but not be limited to): regularly assess patterns of sea turtle bycatch; identify areas of overlap between fishing activities and sea turtle habitats; and provide feasible recommendations for future bycatch reduction strategies.
- Improve on-board observer coverage of longline and purse-seine fishing vessel smaller than class 6 in order to collect additional data on sea turtle bycatch

- Develop a pilot study to evaluate the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of electronic monitoring of longline vessels as tools for monitoring potential bycatch of marine turtles and other species of conservation concern, and expand the program based on results of the pilot study.
- Experiment with bycatch reduction mitigation measures, including actions in passive nets (e.g. light sticks/net illumination, reducing the time of immersion of the net, reduction of the floating line and using best practices for setting and retrieving nets), as well as implement appropriate mitigation methods that could be used by of fleet and gear types with emphasis in the areas with the most probability of interaction with sea turtles.

**b) Joint Analysis of Sea Turtle Mitigation Effectiveness Report and the Bycatch Mitigation Information System (BMIS) (Dr. Shelley Clarke)**

Dr. Shelley Clarke, of the WCPFC, reported on the Bycatch Mitigation Information System (BMIS) that is used by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), which is an online resource for fishery managers, scientists, fishermen and the general public and that has the potential to facilitate to participants in tuna fisheries the understanding of bycatch-related topics and, therefore, the adoption of better conservation and management measures.

The BMIS is a database with information on mitigation and management of bycatch of species such as sharks, seabirds and sea turtles caught incidentally in fisheries targeting highly migratory species such as tuna and billfish.

The BMIS can be accessed through the WCPFC website: <http://bmis.wcpfc.int/index.php>.

**c) Review of the measures adopted in other tRFMOs on sea turtle bycatch and interactions**

On this issue again, Dr. Shelley Clarke, of the WCPFC, reported that a second Workshop on Joint Analysis of Sea Turtle Mitigation Effectiveness in the WCPFC was held from November 3<sup>rd</sup> to November 8<sup>th</sup> at the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council in Hawaii. Representatives from 21 countries and organizations participated in both workshops and contributed valuable data that can be used toward the protection of sea turtles. The workshops were supported by the ABNJ (Common Oceans) Tuna project and the Pacific Community (SPC). The goal of evaluating mitigation effectiveness in longline fisheries was achieved by analyzing more than 2,300 interactions of longline fishing gears with leatherback, loggerhead and green turtles throughout the Pacific.

The results of the workshop can be found on the following website: [Workshop report](#). This report will be presented to the WCPFC Scientific Committee in August 2017 and it may be useful when reviewing current sea turtle conservation and management measures.

**d) Perspectives for future actions, including research**

Mrs. Christina Fahy, of the United States, made a presentation on [sea turtles in United States fisheries](#). She pointed out that there are several species of sea turtles that are endangered or depleted, such as Kemp's ridley, loggerhead, olive ridley and hawksbill turtles. In the United States, 5 main actions are carried out for their protection: reducing fisheries interactions; improving the protection of nesting beaches as well as of their reproduction; international cooperation; monitoring and research; and public commitment. In particular, she referred to the research work on net illumination to reduce bycatch, which has provided data on bycatch reduction of species like turtles, sea lions and dolphins.

She mentioned that 2 vessels were hired for this research; therefore, no work has been developed in commercial fisheries; this is still in the experimental stage. Questions were raised about experimentation costs and the durability of the lights. The cost of the lights has decreased from \$US 15 to \$US 1, and they last for approximately 6 months. The United States representatives offered to present in the future a table with more precise and detailed figures on costs.

## 5. Seabirds

### a) Presentation by the Secretariat of the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP)

Mr. Marco Favero, of the ACAP Secretariat, made a presentation on the work carried out under this Agreement in terms of seabird protection in commercial fisheries. He made four recommendations to the Working Group, which were retaken to be presented to the SAC for consideration. These recommendations are detailed under item 8 of this report and are related to the following topics:

- Publication of tools and guidelines for the protection of incidentally caught seabirds
- Improving the information provided in annual reports (species, bycatch, etc.).
- Analyzing the level of implementation of Resolution C-11-02 for its updating.
- Considering the use of hook shielding devices as a mitigation method.

Regarding the second item, several participants encouraged ACAP to also invite countries that fish tuna with longlines in the IATTC area to increase the required level of observer coverage in longline vessels and thus improve the quantity and quality of the data available on the interaction of longline fisheries with seabirds.

## 6. Sharks

### a) Report on the situation of sharks in the EPO, including bycatch and interactions (*IATTC staff*):

#### i. Updated purse-seine indicators for silky sharks in the EPO

The Director commented that, in the IATTC, there are 3 categories of fisheries interacting with sharks:

- Purse-seine vessels with no direct catch and with good information collected through a 100% observer coverage in class-6 vessels (over 363 t carrying capacity).
- Fisheries targeting sharks, with respect to which the IATTC has no competence and therefore no information.
- Longline fisheries (no direct catch) where information should be improved since, currently, there is only a 5% observer coverage.

He recalled that an assessment of the status of silky and hammerhead sharks has been requested, which is complicated because there is no complete information on longline vessels and there is very little information about hammerhead sharks since purse-seine vessel bycatch is minimal. He recalled that this issue will be discussed at the SAC meeting and Document [SAC-08-08a \(i\) Updated indicators for silky sharks in the EPO](#) was prepared. Additionally, Resolution [C-16-05](#) has been adopted in order to have more information by requiring the CPCs that their fishermen collect catch data for silky and hammerhead sharks and submit them to the IATTC in accordance with IATTC data reporting requirements.

He also recalled that there is already a Resolution focused on silky shark—Resolution [C-16-06](#)—which

includes the prohibition of retaining on board, transshipping, landing, or storing, in part or whole, carcasses of silky sharks (*Carcharhinus falciformis*) caught by purse-seine vessels in the IATTC Convention Area. The Resolution also states that longline vessels shall not include sharks as a fishing target in their fishing licenses and that they shall limit silky shark bycatch to a maximum of 20% of the total catch by fishing trip in weight.

## **ii. Updated results of the FAO-GEF shark project**

The IATTC scientific staff commented that, through the project funded by FAO-GEF, work with sharks is being supported and great progress has been made in terms of data collection, which has allowed the discussion of management measures of some shark species in the Commission. The staff pointed out that this funding is not endless, and that funding should be sought to cover future activities or fund existing ones.

The participant from Costa Rica thanked the support the IATTC has given his country to carry out shark-related work and pointed out that the establishment of a IATTC field office in Punta Arenas would be very useful tool and hence the good results of shark data collection work, not only in Costa Rica, but in Central America. He therefore requested that the proposal already submitted in the Commission be approved.

## **iii. Update on post-release mortality of silky sharks in the longline fishery**

The IATTC scientific staff mentioned that the issue of longline fishery and sharks will be discussed in depth at the SAC meeting in the following days. There is already a document on this matter that can be found at: [SAC-08-07e Establishing minimum data standards and reporting requirements for longline observer programs under resolution C-11-08](#). This document discusses the need for data and ways for collecting them.

## **7. Other business**

No other business was discussed.

## **8. Recommendations to the Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC)**

The working group issued the following recommendations to the SAC for consideration:

- In order to obtain more information on bycatch by longline vessels, consider increasing the current 5% to 20% observer coverage based upon the recommendation of the IATTC scientific staff, as well as request the submission of the operational-level data recorded by observers on board.
- Develop and adopt a general format for reporting on the implementation of FAO Guidelines to reduce sea turtle mortality in fishing operations, as mandated by Resolution C-07-03, as well as improving compliance with the submission of reports.
- Ensure that such reports are made available to CPCs through a controlled-access page on the IATTC website.
- Analyze the level of implementation of Resolution C-07-03 regarding the application of measures to reduce sea turtle bycatch, with a view to its updating, if necessary.
- Foster cooperation with the Inter-American Convention for the Protection of Sea Turtles (IAC), and in particular:

- i. Strengthen cooperation between the two organizations in marine turtle protection activities; continue to invite the IAC to participate in the IATTC Scientific Advisory Committee and recommend that the IATTC participate in relevant meetings of the IAC.
  - ii. Recommend that IATTC and IAC Secretariats work together to continue supporting training in best practices for safe handling and release of marine turtles caught incidentally.
  - iii. Encourage sea turtle bycatch mitigation tests, for example, through using net illumination and reducing the time that nets are submerged.
  - iv. Encourage the IATTC to collaborate with the IAC scientific committee to identify bycatch hotspots in leatherback inter-nesting areas.
- In relation to seabird bycatch:
    - i. Post on the IATTC website already developed existing tools and guidelines, for example, for the use and removal of hooks from incidentally caught birds.
    - ii. Improve the level of information provided in annual reports (species, zero incidental catch, stratified data).
    - iii. Analyze the level of implementation of Resolution C-11-02, for example, regarding mitigation measures used, materials used, etc., with a view to its updating, if necessary.
    - iv. Consider, as an alternative mitigation method, the use of hook shielding devices.
  - Encourage pilot projects with electronic observers, mainly on longline vessels, and suggest CPCs to include in their national reports summary information on the use of electronic observers.
  - Recommend that the Working Group continue meeting at least once a year.

## **9. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 11:00 on May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2017.