

INTER-AMERICAN TROPICAL TUNA COMMISSION (IATTC) 98TH MEETING, AUGUST 23-27, 2021

The impacts of COVID-19 continue to present challenges to RFMOs in conducting meetings. Even under these challenging circumstances, IATTC must ensure the uninterrupted, sustainable management of the tuna stocks and marine ecosystems under its purview. There are several critical measures and issues that require immediate attention by IATTC this year.

This Statement focuses on those critical measures and issues on which IATTC must take action in 2021, which align with the ISSF global priorities for tuna RFMOs.

Tuna Conservation

What are the issues

Effective management measures — consistent with advice from the IATTC Scientific Advisory Committee — are needed to maintain bigeye, yellowfin and skipjack tuna fishing mortality and biomass at sustainable levels.

Why are we concerned?

The current IATTC conservation measure (C-20-06), that was extended for 2021, has been generally ineffective in limiting catches of yellowfin, bigeye and skipjack. In 2020, the IATTC conducted new assessments of bigeye and yellowfin tuna and found that, while yellowfin remains healthy, there is a 53% probability that bigeye is overfished and a 50% probability that overfishing is occurring. Data collection in 2020 and 2021 was compromised due to the pandemic, particularly port sampling in key locations. Therefore the IATTC Scientific Staff advised that the last two years cannot be used to interpret long-term trends for management advice. Although floating-object (OBJ) sets decreased by 25% while catches of bigeye tuna were only 6% less than the recent 5 year average, most stock status indicators (SAC-12-05) based on the OBJ fishery suggest that the fishing mortality of all three species has increased over recent years. This is likely due to the increased trend in the number of OBJ sets. The IATTC Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) recommended that the provisions of C-20-06 be maintained for 2022-2024, except those related to the FAD fishery, and that measures to control fishing on FADs be adopted to avoid exceeding the average fishing mortality in the fishery between 2017-2019. The SAC also recommended that the operational rule proposed by the IATTC Scientific Staff be considered. The IATTC Staff (SAC-12-08) recommended: (i) an operational rule to extend the 72 day closure for all purse seine vessels and both unassociated sets (NOA) and OBJ sets, if the previous year's OBJ sets exceeds the 2017-2019 average and (ii) establish individual-vessel limits on daily active FADs. The SAC further recommended that the next stock assessments for the three tropical tunas are carried out in 2024. However,

Top ISSF Asks for IATTC:

1. Adopt a precautionary tuna conservation and management measure, based on the current scientific advice, including additional FAD management measures.
2. Request the Scientific Staff to provide science-based limits on active FADs, deployments and/or sets. Require the provision of raw data from echosounder buoys. Amend the FAD resolution to include clear timelines to develop FAD marking guidelines and ownership rules, and transitioning to the use of FADs without netting and made primarily of biodegradable materials.
3. Accelerate development of MSE for bigeye, skipjack and yellowfin.
4. Adopt the EMS workplan. Establish a fleet-wide observer program (human or electronic) for small purse seine vessels by 2022. Require 100% observer coverage (human and/or electronic) in industrial tuna fisheries, including all those engaged in at sea transshipment, by 2024.
5. By 2022, adopt a Port State Measures Resolution.
6. Establish a work plan to operationalize paragraphs 5-8 of C-11-07 on Compliance and to develop audit points.

delaying these assessments to 2024 prevents effective monitoring of the status of these stocks and the adoption of adjustments to adopted management measures, if needed.

What is ISSF asking IATTC to do?

- (1) Adopt a conservation management measure that amends or replaces C-20-06, is precautionary and based on scientific advice to limit fishing pressure on yellowfin and bigeye. This measure should also include additional FAD management measures to prevent an increase of fishing mortality beyond the status quo levels, as recommended by the SAC, such as the operational rule to extend the closure, active FAD limits, deployment limits or buoy purchase limits, and clarifying controls on remote activation and deactivation, among others.
- (2) Request the IATTC Staff to review the data collected in 2020 and 2021 and address any deficiencies.
- (3) Revise the stock assessment timeline to ensure an assessment of bigeye is carried out in 2022 and an assessment of skipjack is carried out in 2023, and also establish an alternating schedule thereafter so that a single stock assessment occurs per year.
- (4) Fund needed research to ensure data is collected on FADs so a science-based limit on floating-object (e.g. active numbers, sets, deployments, etc.) can be adopted.

FAD Management

What are the issues?

Comprehensive fleet data on FAD deployments and usage until the end of their life span are required to effectively manage the tropical tuna purse seine fishery. The identification and implementation of FAD marking systems and ownership rules are critical. Data from echo-sounder buoys used to track FADs could help develop effective conservation measures by correctly interpreting key data, such as the relationship between active FADs, OBJ sets and fishing mortality. Also these data would serve to obtain indices of tuna abundance to complement current stock assessment models. In order to reduce the impact of FAD structure on the ecosystem, FADs should avoid the use of netting and be constructed mainly with biodegradable materials.

Why are we concerned?

FAD data provision in the IATTC is still weak. For example, in 2020 the IATTC Staff reported that only 58% of the required FAD data were received and only one country submitted 100% of the data. Detailed FAD data provision is essential to designing effective, science-based conservation measures. The IATTC does not have clear requirements for the provision of raw buoy data, an effective FAD marking scheme or FAD recovery mechanisms.

What is ISSF asking IATTC to do?

- (1) Amend C-20-06 or C-19-01 to include:
 - (i) A requirement to provide raw echo-sounder buoy data received by original users (i.e., vessels, fishing companies), including both trajectories and acoustic biomass information as well as CPCs to provide FAD interaction data from fishing trips without an observer.
 - (ii) A clear timeframe to transition to FADs without nets and that use primarily biodegradable materials.
 - (iii) A workplan to develop and adopt a FAD marking scheme by 2022 for all new FAD deployments, regardless of vessel type, that requires that FADs be marked on both the buoy and the FAD structure.
- (2) Adopt the definitions related to FAD fishing operations listed in Annex 1 of the [FAD Working Group](#) report.
- (3) Develop FAD ownership rules and definitions to ensure FAD accountability is maintained through the end of their lifetime and design FAD-recovery mechanisms and incentives by 2023.
- (4) Develop clearer rules for activation of FAD buoys on-board purse seine vessels prior to deployment and for deactivation of FAD buoys at sea.
- (5) Ensure required FAD data are collected and submitted to IATTC, even for those fleets that interact only sporadically with FADs, and request the Scientific Staff to provide science-based limits on active FADs, deployments and/or sets by 2022.

Harvest Strategies

What are the issues?

Harvest Strategies (HS) — which include target and limit reference points together with Harvest Control Rules (HCR) — provide pre-agreed rules for managing fisheries resources and acting in response to stock status changes.

Why are we concerned?

IATTC needs to urgently develop species-specific harvest strategies, including harvest control rules. The MSC has established hard deadlines for Principle 1 conditions for certified tuna fisheries. For tuna stocks in the IATTC, if harvest control rules are not adopted by June 2023 for southern albacore and by May 2025 for northern albacore, current MSC certifications for these stocks will be suspended.

What is ISSF asking IATTC to do?

As recommended by the SAC:

- (1) Accelerate the process and development of Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) that are shown to be robust to the main uncertainties for bigeye, skipjack and yellowfin.
- (2) Develop an assessment for skipjack tuna, based, among others, on recently collected tagging data per [SAC-12-06](#).
- (3) Ensure continued support for tropical tunas MSE, following guidelines from [C-16-02](#) and [C-19-07](#).

Monitoring, Control and Surveillance

OBSERVER COVERAGE AND ELECTRONIC MONITORING

What are the issues?

Comprehensive observer coverage is critical to effective fisheries management, compliance monitoring, and independent verification of catch, effort, species composition and bycatch. 100% observer coverage (human and/or electronic) is feasible and necessary.

Why are we concerned?

The minimum 5% observer coverage requirement for longline vessels is not being fully met. Moreover, even if the minimum 5% coverage level was met, catch estimates of bycatch species are unlikely to be reliable at that coverage and are insufficient for estimating the total catch of bigeye and yellowfin, as reported by the Bycatch Working Group. The lack of sufficient levels of observer coverage in the longline fishery, and the lack of observer coverage on small purse seiners, compromises data collection and the development of effective measures for non-target species and tuna stocks, as well as the monitoring of these fisheries. IATTC also has no Electronic Monitoring (EM) standards.

What is ISSF asking IATTC to do?

- (1) Adopt the EMS workplan in document [EMS-01-02](#) and adopt Terms of Reference for EM workshops to develop definitions and minimum standards for an electronic monitoring program for tuna purse seine and longline fisheries.
- (2) Establish a fleet-wide observer program (either human or electronic) for small purse seine vessels by 2022.
- (3) Require 100% observer coverage (human and/or electronic) in industrial tuna fisheries, including all those engaged in at sea transshipment, by 2024.

PORT STATE MEASURES

What are the issues?

Effective Port State measures are an important MCS tool essential to strengthening compliance and combatting IUU fishing.

Why are we concerned?

IATTC is the only tuna RFMO that has not yet adopted Port State measures.

What is ISSF asking IATTC to do?

By 2022, adopt a resolution to give full effect to the 2009 FAO Agreement on Port State Measures at a regional level.

Bycatch and Sharks

What are the issues?

IATTC needs to improve measures and strengthen efforts to mitigate the bycatch of vulnerable species in both purse seine and longline fisheries. In addition, science-based conservation and management measures to limit fishing mortality on sharks must be adopted and implemented. Data collection and reporting is essential.

Why are we concerned?

For the past several years, the IATTC Scientific Staff, the Bycatch Working Group and SAC have made bycatch-mitigation and bycatch-reporting recommendations for both purse seine and longline fisheries. Unfortunately, the Commission has not acted to adopt these recommendations to date. Further, proposals by a number of IATTC CPCs to require sharks to be landed with fins naturally attached, and to strengthen measures to conserve shark populations, continue to be rejected.

What is ISSF asking IATTC to do?

- (1) Conduct further research on methods of handling and releasing of elasmobranchs (sharks, mantas, rays) from purse-seine vessels, with special focus on large individuals, to maximize their survival and fund electronic tagging experiments in order to evaluate post-release survival rates.
- (2) Promote the submission of bycatch data from IATTC Class 1-5 purse seine vessels and artisanal fisheries.
- (3) Amend [C-11-02](#) to update seabird mitigation options, including potential harmonization with the WCPFC CMM and ACAP guidelines.
- (4) Take immediate steps to enforce the existing shark-finning resolution, and strengthen it by requiring that all sharks be landed with fins naturally attached.
- (5) As recommended by the SAC, extend [C-19-05](#) and enhance compliance with the following provisions: (i) prohibiting the use of steel leaders during a period of three consecutive months of each year for the relevant portions of CPC national fleets and (ii) requiring notification of the period of the prohibition, the number of vessels subject to the prohibition, and how compliance will be monitored.
- (6) Require all vessel captains to complete the transshipment declaration forms under [C-12-07](#) by species, for all shark catches.

Compliance

What are the issues?

IATTC has a transparent compliance process but it can be strengthened. IATTC has not yet fully implemented the requirements of Resolution [C-11-07](#) on the Process for Improved Compliance of Resolutions Adopted by the Commission, which was adopted in 2011.

Why are we concerned?

IATTC does not report on individual CPC compliance, or their actions, and the IATTC has no scheme of responses to non-compliance.

What is ISSF asking IATTC to do?

Establish a work plan to operationalize paragraphs 5-8 of [C-11-07](#) and to develop audit points for IATTC measures.

ISSF Global Priorities for Tuna RFMOs

Implementation of rigorous harvest strategies, including harvest control rules and reference points

Effective management of fleet capacity, including developing mechanisms that support developing coastal state engagement in the fishery

Science-based FAD management & non-entangling and biodegradable FAD designs

Increased member compliance with all adopted measures adopted, and greater transparency of processes reviewing member compliance with measures

Strengthened Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS) measures and increased observer coverage, including through modern technologies such as electronic monitoring and e-reporting

Adoption of best-practice bycatch mitigation and shark conservation and management measures

Did you know?

ISSF is leading research on biodegradable FADs in collaboration with fleets operating in the EPO, coastal nations, and other stakeholders.

ISSF develops resources for the vessel community, including skippers guidebooks on bycatch-mitigation techniques and as well as reports on electronic monitoring and vessel monitoring systems.

ISSF also offers guidelines for implementing non-entangling and biodegradable FADs.

Three ISSF conservation measures focus on shark and bycatch mitigation.

Two ISSF conservation measures focus on FAD management.



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