

INTER-AMERICAN TROPICAL TUNA COMMISSION

98TH MEETING

(by videoconference)
23-27 August 2021

PROPOSAL IATTC-98 C-1

SUBMITTED BY VENEZUELA

**COMPLEMENTARY MEASURES TO THE CONSERVATION
MEASURES ADOPTED FOR BIGEYE TUNA**

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

The risk analysis carried out by the Commission's scientific staff for the bigeye tuna stock shows two (2) different scenarios, one "pessimistic" and the other "optimistic". This is reflected by a bimodal pattern in the statistical distributions of the management indicators, showing that the stock is well below or well above the target reference points.

Although we are aware that the data for the fishery in 2020 are biased due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they show an increase in bigeye catches (the highest since 2007); although the number of total sets on floating objects decreased by approximately 25%, an increase has been observed in recent years, including 2020, in the number of sets on floating objects in areas 2 and 4, where the majority of bigeye tuna has been caught in the floating-object fishery.

On the other hand, since 2015 there has been a sustained increase in bigeye catches in this fishery, especially juveniles, most of which have not reached sexual maturity. This may affect the available biomass of the species in the short or medium term. In addition, the longline fleet during 2019 and 2020 reported the lowest bigeye catches since 1991 and the average weight has remained around 4.7 and 5.1 kg in the last 6 years.

At the Bilbao meeting, we were provided with the lists of vessels for 2016-2018 that fished on floating objects and catches by species, where it was found that between 10 to 12% of the vessels caught more than 50% of bigeye tuna. At the recently completed 12th meeting of the Scientific Advisory Committee, a plot for 2019 and 2020 was shown, which showed the same pattern as the period previously evaluated, where 25% of the fleet fishing for tunas associated with objects catches between 80 and 90% of all the bigeye tuna in this fishery and, when reviewing the vessel list, it was found that approximately 8% of the vessels (15 vessels) caught between 55 and 58% of the bigeye tuna in this fishery.

In view of the foregoing, and given the uncertainty shown by the estimate of the status of the bigeye tuna stock, we consider that this Commission should agree on precautionary measures, even more so if these were to be taken for a three-year period from 2022 to 2024. It should be noted that these measures have already been presented by the staff at previous meetings (2004 [72nd Meeting, Doc-72-17], 2005 [73rd Meeting, Doc-73-18], 2006 [74th Meeting, Doc-74-05], 2007 [75th Meeting, Doc-75-07b REV]), as well as in other documents such as SAC-12-inf-B.

In this regard, the purpose of this proposal is to present some complementary measures to help us guarantee sustainable bigeye tuna fisheries. The alternative measure that we propose would only affect a very small number of vessels that catch the majority of bigeye, while the other measures would affect a larger number of vessels, but it is imperative that some complementary measures be adopted.

It will be the observers who will have the major task of implementing this resolution, but they have already done so in the past; they have been responsible for collecting catch data by species, which are used by the Commission's staff for statistical and analytical purposes.

As an example, at the beginning of the 90's, the vessels that fished for tunas associated with dolphins had to substantially modify their fishery to conform to the La Jolla Agreement, today AIDCP. The main difficulty was to place the captured tuna in the different markets, a situation that has improved, but it is still present. However, the achievements in the reduction of incidental dolphin mortality were extraordinary, which was worthy of the FAO Margarita Lizárraga Medal Award. *"International recognition for the outstanding work of the AIDCP in the conservation of the tuna fisheries of the eastern Pacific and in particular the revolutionary measures to protect dolphins."*

The Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC):

Recognizing that one of the management objectives for tropical tunas in the eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO) established in the Antigua Convention is to maintain the stocks at levels of abundance which can produce the maximum sustainable yield;

Considering that Article VII, paragraph 1 (f) of the Antigua Convention establishes that the Commission shall adopt, as necessary, measures and recommendations for the conservation and management of species belonging to the same ecosystem and that are affected by fishing for, or dependent on or associated with, the fish stocks covered by this Convention, with a view to maintaining or restoring populations of such species above levels at which their reproduction may become seriously threatened;

Recalling Article IV, paragraph 3, of the Antigua Convention, which states that *"where the status of target stocks or non-target or associated or dependent species is of concern, the members of the Commission shall subject such stocks and species to enhanced monitoring in order to review their status and the efficacy of conservation and management measures"*, and *"shall revise those measures regularly in the light of new scientific information available"*;

Recognizing the continued commitment of the Members of the Commission to building consensus for the improvement of the management of the species covered by the Antigua Convention;

Convinced that, in order to ensure the sustainability of the tuna stocks in the Convention Area, it is imperative to maintain sufficient and effective conservation and management measures in force, adjusted to the time frame of their validity and consistent with the reference points adopted by the Commission;

Noting that the Commission should take precautionary measures when there are indications that any of the tuna stocks covered by the Convention may be affected; and

Concerned about the potential effects of purse-seine operations on the status of bigeye tuna, caused by the fisheries for tunas associated with floating objects;

Agrees:

To apply these alternative measures in the Convention Area, as a complement to the conservation and management measures agreed for tropical tunas for 2022-2024, set out below.

1.- These measures are applicable during 2022-2024 to Class-6 purse-seine vessels fishing for tunas associated with floating objects in the Convention Area.

2.- This measure shall be reviewed by the scientific staff of the Commission and the Scientific Advisory Committee every year this resolution is in effect and, if they determine that bigeye stocks are no longer threatened based on the best scientific evidence available, they may recommend the termination of these measures to the Commission.

3.- During the validity of this resolution, the Commission staff may increase, to the extent possible, port and cannery sampling of vessels that have reached a cumulative catch of five hundred (500) tons of bigeye tuna, according to the data collected by observers.

4.- To recommend to the Commission and National Programs to reinforce and strengthen the capacity of observers to identify and differentiate bigeye and yellowfin tunas.

5.- To limit the total annual catch of bigeye by each purse-seine vessel of 1,250 metric tons, by prohibiting sets on floating objects by a vessel once this limit is reached. The catch of bigeye would be estimated by the observer or, at the request of the captain, by scientific sampling of the catch carried out by the IATTC staff at the time of unloading. If the latter option is chosen, the vessel would be responsible for the cost of the sampling.

and/or,

6.- To prohibit sets on floating objects from February to June between latitudes 4°N and 3°S, and longitudes 110°W and 150°W.