

#13b.3

**2020 ICCAT Correspondence Decision-Making Process
U.S. Delegation Report (excerpts relevant to bluefin)**

Introduction: Due to the pandemic, ICCAT was unable to have an in-person annual meeting in 2020 and instead conducted essential business via correspondence. The highest priority was to extend expiring measures to avoid a lapse in management, given that the nature of the correspondence process did not allow for more complex discussions and negotiations that typically take place at the annual meeting. It was agreed that simple rollover measures would be tabled by the relevant Chairs unless new advice from the Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS) indicated an urgent situation. In any such case, the Commission could consider if something other than a rollover was needed and feasible. The decision-making process began on October 15, 2020, and ended on February 15, 2021, with the Commission adopting nine recommendations and one amendment to its rules of procedure. All 53 ICCAT members had the opportunity to engage in the correspondence process. In light of the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union in January 2020, the United Kingdom joined ICCAT in its own right, replacing its previous membership, which was only on behalf of its overseas territories. Vanuatu withdrew from ICCAT at the end of 2020.

Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean Bluefin Tuna (EBFT): The SCRS was not able to conduct a reliable stock assessment for EBFT in 2020, and instead evaluated whether stock size indicators continue to support advice from the 2017 assessment. On this basis, the SCRS recommended that the TAC of 36,000 t be maintained for two years. [Rec. 20-07](#) was adopted, amending the previous EBFT management recommendation (Rec. 19-04) to extend all current conservation and management measures and maintain the 2020 TAC in 2021 and 2022. The 2022 TAC will be reviewed and may be amended, as appropriate, at the 2021 annual meeting, based on new SCRS advice. Fishing plans for 2021 will be reviewed for endorsement at the virtual Panel 2 intersessional meeting in March. The Panel will also discuss growth rates in farms, implementation of the EBFT regional observer program, and SCRS progress on the BFT MSE. In addition, a proposal to revise management recommendations based on improvements discussed at the 2020 Panel 2 intersessional meeting and the BFT Monitoring and Control Working Group Meeting will be presented and an intersessional review schedule will be discussed.

Western Atlantic Bluefin Tuna (WBFT): The SCRS conducted an update of the stock assessment for WBFT in 2020 and did not change the stock status from “no overfishing/rebuilding status unknown” but expressed concerns about projections of overfishing. The SCRS provided in its advice a number of management scenarios for a three-year projection period that addressed overfishing with at least a 50% probability by 2023 at the latest. The Chair and the United States both tabled proposals by the deadline set for the start of the first correspondence round. The Chair's initial one-year proposal was based on SCRS management scenario 2, which called for a TAC of 1,785 t for 2021. The U.S. proposal was also for a one-year measure, but it did not include a TAC level in order to allow for the input and views of other CPCs given the wide range of TAC advice from the SCRS. An essential component of the U.S. proposal was the call for a new, full stock assessment in 2021 to incorporate some crucial data, data treatments, and information that was not available in time for the 2020 assessment, in particular regarding recruitment indices. Most western harvesters supported the call for a new

assessment but some CPCs, particularly certain eastern harvesters, expressed concern about the precedent of conducting a new assessment so soon after the last one, the workload implications for the Secretariat, SCRS, and CPCs, and the possible negative impact on the SCRS' BFT management strategy evaluation (MSE) work. With regard to the question of which management scenario to follow when setting the TAC for 2021 and potentially future years, views differed, but the nature of the correspondence decision making process made negotiations very challenging.

Ultimately, the various issues in play became tied together into a package, and late into the third and final correspondence round, ICCAT adopted a compromise text ([Rec. 20-06](#)). This recommendation extends the expiring measures of Rec. 17-06 and includes a commitment to reduce the TAC in 2022 and 2023 to address overfishing based on the current best available scientific advice and management scenario 3 analyzed in the assessment. The measure calls for a new, full WBFT stock assessment to take place in 2021; CPCs are encouraged to provide data through 2020 and have been engaging through the SCRS Bluefin Tuna Abundance Indices Subgroup, focused on improving indices, including those reflecting recruitment. Given the relationship between recruitment and catch advice under an $F_{0.1}$ management strategy, having the best available recruitment-related data inputs for use in the assessment is critical. This will ensure the Commission has the most robust scientific information possible when it again considers conservation and management measures for WBFT at the 2021 annual meeting. At the same time, the important work of SCRS on BFT MSE will not be negatively impacted by the new assessment and the conservation and management measures in Rec. 17-06 will continue.

Permanent Working Group for Improvement of Statistics and Conservation Measures (PWG): Issues considered by the PWG included a Chair's proposal to extend the electronic bluefin catch document (eBCD) derogations in Rec. 17-09, forms related to reporting information on abandoned, lost, or otherwise discarded fishing gear under Rec. 19-11, and the draft list of vessels engaged in illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. The Chair deferred all other issues to a 2021 intersessional meeting of the Integrated Monitoring Measures (IMM) Working Group. Several CPCs (EU, Japan, Norway, Morocco) expressed support for extending eBCD derogations for another year. The United States asked for additional information from the EU on their implementation of the derogations to better assess their implementation and impact. The EU provided some additional information, and the United States eventually agreed to the extension of these provisions ([Rec. 20-08](#)).