

Recommendation no. 54

**Conservation and Management of Species within the scope of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT)**

Considering the importance of sustainable marine resource management, which refers to the responsible use of fishery resources, ensuring the long-term conservation of fish stocks, minimizing environmental impacts, and securing the socio-economic future of fishing activities, in order to preserve the ecological balance and the well-being of fishing communities.

Considering the need to adapt to climate change, which has an impact on the seasonality of resources and their geographical distribution.

Also considering the negotiations that will take place at the 24<sup>th</sup> Special Meeting of ICCAT, in November 2024, the Outermost Regions' Advisory Council (CCRUP) highlights a set of essential measures to combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, as well as the strengthening of monitoring and management of tuna stocks and related species in ICCAT's areas of competence, and support for artisanal fishing of the Outermost Regions (ORs).

Thus, the **CCRUP recommends:**

• **Combating IUU fishing** through:

1. Establishment of a properly maintained vessel registry, including the International Maritime Organization (IMO) number for the vessels in question (IMO Resolution A. 1117(30) on the IMO number);
2. Taking action against Contracting and Cooperating Parties (CPCs) that repeatedly fail to submit reports regarding investigations into allegations of non-compliance, and the measures taken to address compliance concerns;
3. The implementation of a regional Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) for all fishing vessels covered by ICCAT;
4. The implementation of a High Sea Boarding and Inspection (HSBI) regime,
5. The total elimination of transshipments at sea and, in the meantime, better control of transshipments;
6. Strengthening the mechanisms of cooperation and collaboration among ICCAT's CPCs through the implementation of "integrated maritime surveillance," as

conceived by the European Union, expanding it to ICCAT's spatial domain, as a safe and secure marine environment is also essential for the development of marine economic activities, in this case, fishing. “Integrated maritime surveillance” aims to provide common modalities for sharing information and data between authorities involved in different aspects of surveillance. Its objective is to improve the efficiency and profitability of maritime surveillance by establishing an adequate, legal, secure, and efficient data exchange system among the CPCs in ICCAT.

- **Increase observation coverage**, particularly through the Electronic Monitoring System (EMS), and integrate, at a minimum, in Resolution 16-01 on minimum observation standards for all fisheries, the required observation coverage in multi-annual conservation and management plans for tropical tuna: 100% for purse seine vessels with retention, 20% for bluefin tuna (*Thunnus thynnus*), and 10% for tropical tuna longliners, considering that the ICCAT Scientific Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS) recommends a minimum observation rate of 20%;
- **Promote the development of a strategy for assessing the multi-species management strategy for tropical tunas** (yellowfin - *Thunnus albacares*, skipjack - *Katsuwonus pelamis*, and bigeye - *Thunnus obesus*), as well as for **blue shark** (*Prionace glauca*);
- **Strengthen data collection** on tuna and related recreational and artisanal fisheries;
- Ensure the improvement of the quality of SCRS advice by promoting the **integration of climate considerations** in Management Strategy Evaluations (MSE) and in management procedures, due to the impact of climate change on the ocean and on the migratory patterns of species under ICCAT;
- Continue to support the approval of the **management procedure for swordfish** (*Xiphias gladius*) in the North Atlantic;
- Considering that Rec. 2021/09 stipulates that the SCRS must propose additional measures to reduce the mortality of **shortfin mako** (*Isurus oxyrinchus*), which has not happened despite the fact that the mortality of this species is above the agreed limit of 250 tons. Thus, as the CCRUP recommended for negotiations at IOTC, we **recommend that the European Commission advocate at the ICCAT annual meeting for measures that effectively**

**reduce shark mortality**, such as replacing wire leaders with other materials (as practiced by Azorean fishers);

- Expanding on the previous point, due to the accidental catches that occur with the use of these wire leaders, and if the proposal to ban them is not accepted, we **recommend prohibiting the capture of sharks and elasmobranchs**, since, among other justifications, it has been found that:
  1. Sharks and elasmobranchs are structuring species and are in decline.
  2. They are fundamental to the food chain and to maintaining the balance of ecosystems and marine resources.

Regarding the ICCAT moratorium on Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs), it is important to highlight that, since 2020, the socio-economic impact of this moratorium on the European Union (EU) purse seiner fleets has been extremely pronounced. Four EU purse seiners have already ceased their activity and, globally, the number, catches and productivity of EU vessels have decreased as a result of the moratorium, contrary to Asian purse seiner fleets. Furthermore, the poorly monitored fleets of Ghana and Senegal have increased their global catches and recorded an illogical decline in the contribution of bigeye tuna. It is important to highlight that a moratorium on FADs is a supplementary measure to quotas, which are, within the scope of ICCAT, the main factor in catches.

However, it is also very important to highlight, with regard to the moratorium referred to in the previous paragraph, that the FADs have influenced the sharp decline in tropical tuna stocks, forcing ICCAT to establish recovery and management plans for some of these species, such as bluefin tuna and bigeye tuna, which has seriously affected artisanal fishing in the outermost regions, due to the reduction in the biomass of these species and catch restrictions. We consider that these devices harm the conservation of fishery resources and jeopardize their survival and that of artisanal fleets.

Considering that the state of the stocks of bigeye and probably of albacore have improved, we **recommend that the period of the closure of the Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) be maintained, for 72 days**, as this measure has had a positive impact on reducing the capture of juvenile tuna. We reinforce that this measure must continue to be applicable to all fleets operating in the Atlantic (without exception) and, consequently, we recommend that the appropriate measures be taken and that there be a collective effort by all parties to ensure that this measure is effectively complied with.

As regards the **bigeye tuna**, on condition that EU fleets can benefit from the increase in the Total Allowable Catch (TAC), the **CCRUP recommends a commitment of 73,000 tonnes**, a level that received broad support during the last intersessional meeting of Panel 1. The European fleet, which made great efforts last year, should be able to benefit from the increased TAC. It would be incomprehensible for the European catch limit to decrease, while the global TAC increases. Relocation issues must not compromise the fishing opportunities of European fleets. Furthermore, provided that Panel 1 discussions are geared towards an allocation of TACs that includes a global quota for small-scale fishers, there should be real-time monitoring of the use of TACs for all CPCs and prior information to ICCAT on the fisheries management plan for low-income CPCs that plan to develop their fisheries, in order to anticipate quota transfer needs.

Regarding the **albacore tuna**, the SCRS indicated at its 2024 meeting that the stock was neither overfished nor subject to overfishing, and that the TAC could be increased to 125,000 tonnes without affecting the status of the stock. Therefore, the **CCRUP recommends that the European Commission advocate for a TAC of 125,000 tonnes for albacore tuna, at ICCAT.**

Given that one of the objectives of the ORs is to continue preserving fishery resources while simultaneously supporting artisanal fishing, which is a traditional practice in our territories, **we recommend avoiding the authorisation of industrial fishing within the 12-mile zone of the ORs.**

### **Portuguese Outermost Regions**

**Tropical tunas**, particularly bigeye tuna, represent one of the main target species of the fisheries in the Azores and hold significant socio-economic importance for the Region. Over the years, the European Commission has maintained its quota for tropical tuna, with the exception of the bigeye tuna quota which has gradually decreased. Thus, the need to increase the quota is becoming increasingly urgent, prioritising sustainable fishing, including the fishing activities of the ORs.

The annual quota for bigeye tuna for Portugal is 2,823 tonnes, of which 85% is allocated to

the Portuguese ORs, that is, 2,400 tonnes. However, the bigeye tuna fisheries in the Azores and Madeira, in 2023, exhausted their quota on the 31<sup>st</sup> of May, and in the current year, the quota was exhausted on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May. Thus, considering that tuna fishing in the Azores is seasonal, typically occurring between March and September (although it can exceptionally start in January), and given the reduced bigeye tuna quota, this has led to the early closure of the fishery, as mentioned above.

Considering that the coastal fleet makes short trips to catch tuna, operating in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of the Azores and Madeira, this fleet, despite needing to be modernized, has storage and refrigeration capacity (through the use of ice and mechanical refrigeration), which allows the tuna to be of excellent quality upon first sale and to either be consumed fresh, frozen or later processed for sale, being also used in the canning industry.

All the fish unloading and first sale operations of fish in the Azores are carried out through Lotaçor, where on all the Islands there is a fish auction (on some islands, more than one). The fish auction facilities and cold stores have refrigeration and freezing equipment, as well as ice production, which is made available to the entire fleet, complying with control rules, which guarantee the necessary conditions for the production, distribution and commercialisation of fish in the Azores and for export.

Tuna fishing in the Azores is associated with one of the largest statistical data collection programmes, onboard tuna fishing vessels, called POPA. Through this programme, tuna capture in the Azores has been certified with Dolphin Safe certification (since 1998) and Friends of the Sea certification (since 2001), and it can therefore be stated through monitoring that it is a sustainable fishery, operating with selective fishing gear where the bycatch rate is practically zero. This fishing is also recognized by Naturland (since 2020), for having good environmental practices and undergoing rigorous evaluation and auditing processes.

In 2021, Azorean fishing was the first fishery in the world to be recognized for its «Plastic Neutrality», including in the Global Campaign of *International Pole & Line Foundation* - a global initiative – that highlighted pole and line fishing as an example to follow and a solution for the future of sustainable fishing.

Considering also that, currently, about 80% of the Azorean fleet has a license to practice the art of pole and line fishing, we can say that there is a great direct and indirect impact on the local economy and, consequently, on the maintenance of local jobs, which contributes to the settlement of the population in these regions.

We must also highlight the role that the canning industry plays in the development of the Portuguese ORs, where around 900 of the jobs that are created are female labour force, who, with their work, contribute to the creation of new products and markets, allowing export to more than 40 countries. However, this industry is also dependent on an increase in the quota for Portuguese ORs to be able to use locally caught tuna and not have to resort to imports, in order to achieve its commercial objectives, guaranteeing the proposed carbon neutrality by the year 2050.

The pole-and-line fishing method, a deeply traditional fishing technique, aligns entirely with the reports of the International Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) concerning: the selectivity of fisheries, proximity to local communities, fish supply needs, small-scale economies, and rational fuel consumption in the development of the activity. This fishing method also aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) established by the United Nations (UN), particularly in the context of eradicating poverty and combating hunger, as it is an important means of food production; in the field of prosperity and harmony of people with nature; as well as relating to resource protection, given the way this fishery operates and connects with some of the priorities adopted by the European Commission, especially regarding the 'European Green Deal' and the construction of an economy that works for people.

Furthermore, considering the initiative by fishers to implement a minimum size for the capture of bigeye tuna in the Azores and Madeira, set at 10 kg, with the aim of increasing the selectivity and sustainability of this fishery, as decreed by Regional Ordinance No. 56/2020, of 3 March 2020, quantities per vessel and per trip have also been negotiated with the sector.

In light of the above, **we recommend an increase to 3,600 tonnes of bigeye tuna for the Portuguese outermost regions**, to ensure the sustainability of this sector, the future of this fishery, and all jobs related to production, commercialisation, processing, and industry in these regions. To this end, at the ICCAT level, the European Commission should request **an increase of the European quota** that allows this volume to be allocated to the fleets of the Portuguese ORs.

## Outermost Region of Spain

The population unit of **bigeye tuna**, traditionally targeted by the fishing fleet of the Canary Islands, is exploited in accordance with ICCAT recommendations to ensure conservation and promote the goal of optimal utilisation of this species throughout the Atlantic Ocean and adjacent seas. This fishery must serve the social purpose of fishery resources.

We would like to remind and emphasise that the fishing fleet of the Canary Islands has a high dependence on the capture of bigeye tuna in an island territory with a precarious structural, social, and economic situation.

In this context, and given that the fleet of the Canary Islands is subject to quota restrictions based on the provisions of the Spanish internal normative governing this fishery, which favours the capture history of the industrial fleet to the detriment of sustainable fishing methods that do not harm the resource, such as those used by the artisanal fleet of the Canary Islands, one man one hook, it would be necessary for **ICCAT to allocate a specific quota directly benefiting the artisanal fishers of the Canary Islands**, in line with the current ICCAT Recommendation 22-01, which replaces Recommendation 21-01, 'relating to a multi-annual programme for the conservation and management of tropical tunas,' which states that **“special consideration shall be given to the needs and specificities of small-scale artisanal fishers”**.

### Opinion of Asociación Tinerfeña de Amigos de la Naturaleza (ATAN)

They do not know of the studies that support the quantities proposed for the quotas of the different territories and are therefore abstaining from commenting on these.

They do not agree with the inclusion of the following paragraph in the recommendation: *“Regarding the ICCAT moratorium on Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs), it is important to highlight that, since 2020, the socio-economic impact of this moratorium on the European Union (EU) purse seiner fleets has been extremely pronounced. Four EU purse seiners have already ceased their activity and, globally, the number, catches and productivity of EU vessels have decreased as a result of the moratorium, contrary to Asian purse seiner fleets. Furthermore, the*

*poorly monitored fleets of Ghana and Senegal have increased their global catches and recorded an illogical decline in the contribution of bigeye tuna. It is important to highlight that a moratorium on FADs is a supplementary measure to quotas, which are, within the scope of ICCAT, the main factor in catches” (p. 3).*

They consider that FADs are not selective and are harmful to any species and size, and recommend that they be completely banned due to their high negative impact. In addition, they argue that international agreements should be established so that the ban is total and so that European companies are not affected by what can be understood as unfair competition through the use of harmful devices.

Opinion of the *Comité National des Pêches Maritimes et des Elevages Marins (CNPMEM)*, of *Europêche*, of the *Organización de Productores Asociados de Grandes Atuneros Congeladores (OPAGAC)*, of the *Organisation des Producteurs de Thon Congelé et Surgelé (Orthongel)*, and of the *Unión des Armateurs à la Pêche de France (UAPF)*

They do not agree with the inclusion of the following paragraphs in the recommendation:

*“However, it is also very important to highlight, with regard to the moratorium referred to in the previous paragraph, that the FADs have influenced the sharp decline in tropical tuna stocks, forcing ICCAT to establish recovery and management plans for some of these species, such as bluefin tuna and bigeye tuna, which has seriously affected artisanal fishing in the outermost regions, due to the reduction in the biomass of these species and catch restrictions. We believe that these devices harm the conservation of fishery resources and jeopardize their survival and that of artisanal fleets.”*

*“Considering that the state of the stocks of **bigeye** and probably of **albacore** improved, we recommend that the period of termination of the use of Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) be maintained, for 72 days, as this measure has had a positive impact on reducing the capture of juvenile tuna. We reinforce that this measure must continue to be applicable to all fleets operating in the Atlantic (without exception) and, consequently, we recommend that the appropriate measures be taken and that there be a collective effort by all parties to ensure that this measure is effectively complied with.”* (page 3), since the ICCAT Scientific Committee itself



indicates, in paragraph 19.38 of its [2024 report](#), that:

- The impact of the closure of FADs could not be reliably verified,
- In the case of bigeye tuna, no closure is necessary to keep the stock within the green zone of the Kobe matrix,
- In the case of albacore tuna, the most effective way to maintain the population unit within the green zone of the Kobe matrix would be:
  1. To respect the total TAC, without any closure;
  2. A closure not only of FADs, but of all fisheries;
  3. The least effective would be the closure of FADs.

They also emphasise that the initial objective of the current closure of FADs was to improve the status of the bigeye tuna stock, not that of albacore tuna. Focusing attention on albacore tuna means creating a new measure and reviewing the season and duration of the closure, as well as the fleets to which it would apply to.

Opinion of the *Comité Régional des Pêches Maritimes et des Elevages Marins de Guyane* (CRPMEM Guyane) and the *Comité Régional des Pêches Maritimes et des Elevages Marins de Martinique* (CRPMEM Martinique)

They abstain from commenting on TACs as they are not yet authorised to fish pelagics and are not covered by a quota.

Opinion of the *Federación Provincial de Cofradías de Pescadores de Santa Cruz de Tenerife* (FPCPSCT)

They do not agree with the inclusion of the following paragraph in the recommendation: “Regarding the ICCAT moratorium on Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs), it is important to highlight that, since 2020, the socio-economic impact of this moratorium on the European Union (EU) purse seiner fleets has been extremely pronounced. Four EU purse seiners have already ceased their activity and, globally, the number, catches and productivity of EU vessels have

*decreased as a result of the moratorium, in contrast to Asian purse seiner fleets. Furthermore, the poorly monitored fleets of Ghana and Senegal have increased their global catches and recorded an illogical decline in the contribution of bigeye tuna. It is important to highlight that a moratorium on FADs is a supplementary measure to quotas, which are, within the scope of ICCAT, the main factor in catches.”* (p. 3), as they consider it necessary to highlight the benefits that these measures have brought to the recovery of fish stocks. In this perspective, the moratorium should be viewed not only as a challenge but also as an opportunity to ensure the long-term sustainability of tuna stocks. The opinion of the majority of the CCRUP members even defends maintaining the closure, as it is positive for the recovery of resources. Thus, the FPCPSCT emphasises that FADs harm the conservation of fishery resources and jeopardise their survival as well as that of artisanal fleets.

Continuing from the paragraph where the recommendation to **'maintain the closure period for the use of Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) for 72 days'** (p. 3) is mentioned, they believe that the following should be added: “In fact, any proposed measure aimed at reducing the moratorium on FADs would mean going against the responsible use of marine resources, as well as the conservation of stocks and the sustainable management of fisheries, and would also be contrary to the Common Fisheries Policy and ICCAT itself. Based on the above, we consider that, at the very least, the current moratorium should be maintained and the number of authorizations reduced. These devices harm the conservation of fishery resources and jeopardize their survival.”

### Sciaena's Opinion

They abstain from the sentence: “*The European fleet, which made great efforts last year, should be able to benefit from the increased TAC. It would be incomprehensible for the European catch limit to decrease while the global JAC increases. Relocation issues must not compromise the fishing opportunities of European fleets.*” (p. 4).

Regarding the sentence: “*In light of the above, we recommend an increase to 3,600 tonnes of bigeye tuna for the Portuguese outermost regions to ensure the sustainability of this sector, the future of this fishery, and all jobs related to production, commercialisation, processing, and industry in these regions.*” (p. 6), they position themselves in favour of positive differentiation for fishing gears with greater sustainability potential, such as pole and line, but abstain from

commenting on allocation values.

Regarding the TAC for albacore tuna, they consider that the value to be agreed upon by ICCAT should be 120,000 tonnes, since, according to the SCRS, a TAC of 120,000 tonnes provides at least a 60% probability of the stock remaining in the green zone of the Kobe matrix.