



28.11.2023

## MISSION REPORT

following the delegation of the Committee on Fisheries to the 28th Regular Meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), Cairo, Egypt, 16-20 November 2023

Committee on Fisheries

Members of the mission:

Francisco José Millán Mon	(1st Vice-Chair, PPE) (Leader of the mission)
Gabriel Mato	(PPE coordinator)
Isabel Carvalhais	(S&D coordinator)
Clara Aguilera	(S&D)

## **Introduction**

The International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) held its 28th Regular Meeting from 13 to 20 November 2023 in New Cairo, Egypt.

The meeting was attended by delegates from the Contracting Parties (CPC), Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties, Intergovernmental Organisations and Non-Governmental Organisations.

The following Members of the PECH Committee participated in the ICCAT meetings as part of the official EU Delegation led by Mr. Stijn BILLIET, Head of Unit for Regional Fisheries Management Organizations in DG MARE:

- Francisco MILLÁN MON (EPP, ES)
- Gabriel MATO (EPP, ES)
- Isabel CARVALHAIS (S&D, PT)
- Clara AGUILERA (S&D, ES)

This was the 12th delegation of Members of the European Parliament attending an ICCAT Annual Meeting since the Treaty of Lisbon came into force.

As an established tradition, during the ICCAT meeting Members also had the opportunity to hold several *in situ* meetings with fisheries stakeholders.

## **28th Regular Meeting of ICCAT**

ICCAT convened in Egypt to evaluate the results of the 2023 work plan, together with the current status of application of the regulatory measures in force and to establish the conservation and management measures for the future.

In 2023, full scientific stock assessments were carried out for three species: **Atlantic blue shark** (*Prionace glauca*), the most common shark species caught in ICCAT fisheries; eastern and western **Atlantic sailfish** (*Istiophorus albicans*), a common billfish in artisanal fisheries; and, northern **Atlantic albacore** (*Thunnus alalunga*).

In total, **20 Recommendations** and **4 Resolutions** were adopted during this meeting, covering Atlantic tuna and tuna-like species conservation and fisheries management.

### **North Atlantic albacore**

The effectiveness of the management measures adopted for North Atlantic albacore in recent years resulted in an increase in abundance, allowing ICCAT to set a new TAC of 47.251 t (+25%) for this stock for 2024 to 2026.

### **North Atlantic and South Atlantic blue shark**

For North Atlantic blue shark, which is in much better shape than the southern one, a compromise text was adopted, cutting the annual TAC from 39.000 t to 30.000 t (-23%) despite the fact that the stock is considered in good shape and not overfished.

In the case of the southern stock, the TAC was set at MSY level at 27.711 t, but very difficult negotiations ultimately resulted in a catch reduction of around 25 % for the EU, dropping to **17.405 t** from 23.200 t (average EU catches from 2019-2021). EP Members had strongly voiced their deep concern about such a drastic reduction. The European Commission insisted on the need for this difficult decision to reduce the catches to avoid much stronger measures within 3 years due to scientific advice, although the quota allocated to the EU still represents a good percentage over the total.

#### **North Atlantic swordfish**

On North Atlantic swordfish, ICCAT agreed to review the stock in the 2024 Annual Meeting and to establish the TAC for 2025-2027 and subsequent years.

#### **Bluefin tuna (BFT)**

While in this meeting negotiations on BFT quotas were not on the agenda, it was important for the EU Delegation to obtain approval for a **pilot project for Bluefin tuna farming in the Cantabrian Sea**, as well as an adjustment of the redundant concept of “farming capacity” in BFT farming.

#### **Tropical tunas (incl. Bigeye and Yellowfin)**

Albeit the extensive discussions regarding the multi-annual conservation and management programme for tropical tunas, and many rounds of negotiations in Panel 1 and in bilateral meetings, no substantial progress was achieved. Therefore, a simple rollover of the current measures was agreed, which implies a Total Allowable Catch for Bigeye tuna of 62.000 t for 2024, while the annual TAC for Yellowfin will remain at 110.000 t.

In addition, in order to reduce the fishing mortality of juvenile Bigeye and Yellowfin tuna, a 72-day fishing closure and the limitation on the use of FADs in 2024 were also maintained. Finally, a roadmap was agreed for the work to be done to review existing measures and, *inter alia*, develop catch limits and associated catch verification mechanisms for 2025.

#### **New protection measures for cetaceans, whale sharks & rays**

ICCAT adopted three new protection measures for cetaceans, whale sharks and mobulid rays caught in the Convention area in association with ICCAT fisheries, which prohibit these species being retained on board, transhipped, or landed, in whole or in part.

#### **Shark finning**

On shark finning, Japan vetoed the European Union’s proposal for a recommendation concerning the conservation of sharks caught in association with fisheries managed by ICCAT, which would have included the obligation to provide more data to scientists and to land the fins naturally attached to carcasses.

#### **Conservation and management measures**

ICCAT also took solid steps to reinforce and ensure the effective implementation of conservation and management measures. In particular, ICCAT adopted Recommendations establishing minimum standards and programme requirements for the use of Electronic Monitoring Systems in ICCAT fisheries and a Resolution on core principles on Labour Standards in ICCAT fisheries.

Amendments were also made to strengthen ICCAT's existing port inspection and Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) vessel listing measures and a Standing Working Group on Catch Document Schemes was established.

### **Compliance**

The Compliance Committee focused on a more in-depth review of Contracting Parties implementation of ICCAT requirements and on a schedule to address compliance issues. A more comprehensive approach was also agreed to encourage the use of capacity building as a tool to improve compliance in ICCAT.

Finally, Contracting Parties re-elected all officers and Panel Chairs for another 2-year mandate.

### **Full list of ICCAT Recommendations and Resolutions adopted**

- Recommendation by ICCAT to replace Recommendation 19-08 on management measures for the **conservation of the South Atlantic blue shark** caught in association with ICCAT fisheries
- Recommendation by ICCAT to replace Recommendation 19-07 on management measures for the **conservation of North Atlantic blue shark** caught in association with ICCAT fisheries
- Recommendation by ICCAT replacing Recommendation 22-03 extending and amending Recommendation 17-02 for the **conservation of North Atlantic swordfish**
- Recommendation by ICCAT extending and amending Recommendation 22-01 on a Multi-annual **Conservation and Management Programme for tropical tunas**
- Recommendation by ICCAT for a **pilot project for farming Bluefin tuna in the Cantabrian Sea**
- Recommendation by ICCAT amending the Recommendation 22-08 establishing a Multi-annual **Management Plan for Bluefin tuna in the eastern Atlantic and the Mediterranean**
- Recommendation by ICCAT amending the Recommendation 22-09 establishing a **management procedure for Atlantic Bluefin tuna** to be used for both the western Atlantic and eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean management areas
- Recommendation by ICCAT amending the Recommendation 21-04 on conservation

and management measures, including a management procedure and exceptional circumstances protocol, for **North Atlantic albacore**

- Recommendation by ICCAT for the **conservation of whale sharks** (*Rhincodon typus*) caught in association with ICCAT fisheries
- Recommendation by ICCAT on **mobulid rays** (family Mobulidae) caught in association with ICCAT fisheries
- Supplemental Recommendation by ICCAT amending Recommendation 22-12 on the **bycatch of sea turtles** caught in association with ICCAT fisheries
- Recommendation by ICCAT on Senegal's **bigeye tuna payback plan**
- Recommendation by ICCAT on Brazil's **bigeye tuna payback plan**
- Recommendation by ICCAT on Curaçao's **blue marlin payback plan**
- Recommendation by ICCAT amending and replacing Recommendation 18-13 on an ICCAT **Bluefin Tuna Catch Documentation programme**
- Recommendation by ICCAT amending Recommendation 21-13 on establishing a **list of vessels presumed to have carried out IUU** (illegal, unreported and unregulated) fishing activities
- Recommendation by ICCAT to establish minimum standards and programme requirements for the use of **Electronic Monitoring Systems** (EMS) in ICCAT fisheries
- Recommendation by ICCAT on **Port State measures** to prevent, deter, and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing
- Recommendation by ICCAT on establishment of a **Standing Catch Document Scheme Working Group** (CDS WG)
- Resolution by ICCAT on core principles on **labour standards in ICCAT fisheries**

- Resolution by ICCAT on **cetaceans encirclement**
- Resolution by ICCAT on next steps on the **Joint Experts Group on Climate Change** in 2024
- Resolution by ICCAT on the implementation of **biodiversity conservation instruments**

Link to ICCAT 2023 documents: <https://www.iccat.int/com2023/index.htm#>

## **Conclusions**

ICCAT took important decisions on the regulation of ICCAT fisheries and adopted, among others new measures for the protection of cetaceans, whale sharks and mobulid rays incidentally caught in ICCAT fisheries, as well as new conservation measures for Atlantic blue shark. An increase in the North albacore Total Allowable Catch and the establishment of minimum standards and programme requirements for the use of Electronic Monitoring Systems in ICCAT fisheries were also adopted.

ICCAT remains a very important forum to attend for the Committee on Fisheries, as its decisions and recommendations - to be transposed into Community law - directly affect a very large segment of the EU fishing fleet and a good portion of waters of strategic importance for the EU and its Member States.

Over the past years, the relationship between the Commission (DG MARE) and Parliament concerning ICCAT negotiations have become more affirmative. In preparation for the ICCAT Annual meeting, the cooperation between Parliament and the Commission follows a constructive pattern:

- DG MARE informs Parliament on the main negotiating points it proposes to the Council in the form of a Commission Services "non-paper".
- A preparatory meeting takes place in October, attended by national fisheries stakeholders, NGOs and PECH Committee representatives.
- DG MARE updates the PECH Committee on the negotiations in the last Committee meeting before the ICCAT Annual meeting (*this year on 9 November*)
- During the ICCAT Annual meeting, the Head of the EU delegation offers a daily debrief on the developments in the ongoing negotiations.

However, PECH Members regret that once again they have encountered difficulties in obtaining from Commission and Council the final “EU Negotiation Mandate” in time to prepare for the ICCAT Annual meeting. We trust this will improve next year.



# PROGRAMME

## European Parliament

2019 - 2024



### **Delegation of the Committee on Fisheries to the 28th Regular Meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) New Cairo, Egypt - 16-20 November 2023**

#### **Accommodation:**

##### **Fairmont Nile City Hotel**

Address: Nile City Towers - 2005 B, Corniche El Nil, Cairo  
Telephone: +20 22 461 9494

#### **ICCAT Meeting venue:**

##### **Triumph Luxury Hotel**

Address: Block 19, Fifth Settlement, New Cairo  
Telephone: +20-2-26729900

## **THURSDAY 16 NOVEMBER 2023**

### **TRAVEL DAY**

Individual travel to Cairo International Airport (CAI) - flight MS726: BRU 14.35 - arr. 19.55

Group transfer from CAI Airport to the Hotel

## **FRIDAY 17 NOVEMBER 2023**

08.00 Meeting point for all Delegation Members: Fairmont Hotel Lobby  
Transfer to the ICCAT Meeting venue

08.45 - 09.30 Accreditation & introduction

09.30 - 10.00 Meeting with ICCAT President Ernesto PENAS

10.30 - 13.00 Attendance of the meeting of Panel 4 (*other species: Swordfish, Sharks*)  
*Focus on Measures for the conservation of stocks and implementation of the  
ICCAT criteria for the allocation of Fishing Possibilities*

13.00 - 14.30 Lunch break

14.30 - 16.00 Attendance of the meeting of the Permanent Working Group (*Statistics &*



*Conservation measures - Focus on vessel inspection)*

- 16.30 - 18.00 Attendance of the meeting of Panel 2 (*Temperate tunas: Albacore, Bluefin tuna*)  
*Focus on Measures for the conservation of stocks and implementation of the ICCAT Criteria for the allocation of Fishing Possibilities*
- 18.00 - 19.00 Debriefing session by the Head of EU Delegation on ongoing negotiations
- Individual dinner arrangements

**SATURDAY 18 NOVEMBER 2022**

- 09.00 Transfer to the ICCAT Meeting venue
- 09.45 - 10.30 Attendance of the meeting of Panel 1 (*Tropical tunas: Bigeye, Yellowfin*)  
*Focus on Measures for the conservation of stocks and implementation of the ICCAT Criteria for the allocation of Fishing Possibilities*
- 11.00 - 13.00 Attendance of the meeting of Panel 2 (*Northern & southern Blue Shark*)
- 13.00 - 14.30 Lunch break
- 14.30 - 16.00 Attendance of the meeting of Panel 1 (*Tropical tunas: Bigeye, Yellowfin, continued*)
- 16.00 - 16.30 Meeting with EU stakeholders
- 16.30 - 18.00 Attendance of the meeting of Panel 2 (*Bluefin Tuna, Northern Blue Shark, FADs, continued*)
- 18.00 - 19.00 Debriefing session by the Head of EU Delegation on ongoing negotiations
- Individual dinner arrangements

**SUNDAY 19 NOVEMBER 2023**

- 09.00 Transfer to the ICCAT Meeting venue
- 10.00 - 11.00 Attendance of the meeting of Panel 2 (*Bluefin Tuna, Northern Blue Shark, FADs, continued*)
- 11.00 - 13.00 Attendance of the meeting of Panel 4 (*other species: Swordfish, Sharks, Rays, continued*)
- 13.00 - 14.30 Lunch break

- 14.30 - 16.00 Attendance of the meeting of the Permanent Working Group (*Statistics & Conservation measures, final round*)
- 16.30 - 18.00 Attendance of the meeting of Panel 1 (*Tropical tunas: Bigeye, Yellowfin, final round*)

Final debriefing

Individual dinner arrangements

<b>MONDAY 20 NOVEMBER 2023 - TRAVEL DAY</b>
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- 09.00 Transfer to the ICCAT Meeting venue
- 10.00 - 11.30 ICCAT Plenary session, adoption of final recommendations
- 11.30 End of the mission
- Transfers to Cairo International Airport (CAI) and return flights.

# ***LIST OF PARTICIPANTS***

**Delegation of the Committee on Fisheries to the  
28th Regular meeting of the International Commission for the  
Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT)  
Cairo, Egypt  
16-20 November 2023**

## **MEMBERS**

1. MILLÁN MON Francisco (1st Vice Chair, PPE)
2. MATO Gabriel (PPE)
3. CARVALHAIS Isabel (S&D)
4. AGUILERA Clara (S&D)

## **POLITICAL GROUPS**

1. OBE Maxime (PPE)

## **SECRETARIAT**

1. QUARANTA Claudio
2. SVANE Sten

## **No EP interpreters**

(ICCAT working languages are EN/FR/ES/AR)