

MINUTES

34th LDAC Working Group 1 Meeting Highly Migratory (Tuna and Tuna-like) Stocks and their RFMOs

Tuesday, 15 October 2024, 10:00-13:00h CET/GMT+1

Venue: Martin's Brussels EU Hotel - Blvd. Charlemagne 80, 1000 Brussels

Chair: Anne-France Mattlet.

Acting Vice Chair: Ignacio Fresco (in place of Louis Lambrechts).

1. Welcome by the Chair.

WG1 Chair, Ms. Anne-France Mattlet, starts the meeting thanking WG1 members and observers, including representatives of EC DG MARE, the Spanish Secretariat General for Fisheries (SGP) and AZTI scientists for their presence and participation in this meeting.

She then informs that the current Vice Chair, Louis Lambrechts, has left his job at WWF EPO to join Oceano Azul Foundation. Therefore, a new Vice Chair needs to be appointed.

The NGOs propose Mr. Ignacio Fresco, OCEANA, as the new interim Vice Chair until a final decision is made at the next WG1 meeting.

It is unanimously AGREED to accept this proposal.

The list of members and observers attending the meeting is included in **Annex I**.

2. Approval of the minutes of the last WG1 meeting - Brussels, 5 March 2024.

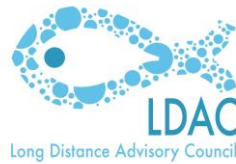
The minutes of the previous WG1 meeting are approved with no changes or comments.

3. Approval of the agenda.

The Chair informs the members that there are two new items to be included in the agenda, which are the following:

- code of conduct for EU delegates attending RFMO meetings
- Feedback from Director General of Fisheries, Ms. Vitcheva, at the last coordination meeting with Advisory Councils.

AGREEMENT: to approve the agenda including these two items.



4. ICCAT - Atlantic Ocean.

4.1- Progress report on outcomes of SCRS (YFT) and MSE for tropical tuna.

Mr. Gorka Merino, AZTI, makes a detailed presentation on the scientific recommendations and assessments by the ICCAT Scientific Committee (SCRS), attaching special importance to yellowfin tuna (YFT), as well as to MSE processes open to long-term management plans for tropical tuna. Mr. Merino's presentation is available on the LDAC's website: https://ldac.eu/images/Presentation_Outcomes_SCRS_and_MSE_TT_2024_Gorka_Merino.pdf

4.2- Report on EU main priorities for 2024 ICCAT Annual Meeting (11-17 Nov 2024)

The Chair notes that no EC representative will attend to report on this matter. Unit B2 declined to attend claiming other commitments, indicating that on 7 October a hybrid meeting with all EU stakeholders had been organised on this matter.

4.3- Open discussion and questions from the floor.

Following complaints from the attendees about the absence of EC representatives to discuss this item, the following **ACTION** is agreed:

- **To send a letter to the EC expressing the members' dissatisfaction and the importance of having EC representatives present in order to assess the specific work carried out by the LDAC and to have a smooth discussion and an exchange of views to enrich the arguments for the preparation of advice.**

4.4- Update on the Inter-AC cooperation agreement on ICCAT

The General Secretary, Mr. Alexandre Rodríguez, highlights the joint work of the 4 Advisory Councils with interests in the fisheries regulated by ICCAT, i.e., SWWAC-MEDAC-CCRUP-LDAC. He is grateful for their collaboration and receptiveness to the LDAC proposal and underlines that in 2023 they managed to sign a [formal collaboration agreement including short-term \(2024\), medium-term \(2025\) and long-term \(2026 and beyond\) objectives – this agreement is available on the LDAC website: https://ldac.eu/images/ADOPTED_Inter_AC_cooperation_agreement_on_ICCAT_July2024.pdf](https://ldac.eu/images/ADOPTED_Inter_AC_cooperation_agreement_on_ICCAT_July2024.pdf) The purpose of this agreement is to keep all 4 ACs informed on the work of each AC, attend their meetings as observers and enhance coordination and allocation of roles that enable to discuss and even agree on common arguments for future consultation meetings with the EC and the drafting and preparation of advice.

He informs that on last 3 October they had a preparatory meeting where they agreed on a work calendar for next year.

In addition, he highlights that MEDAC sent a letter to the EC supporting some sections of the LDAC advice on ICCAT regarding horizontal issues (e.g. control or fight against IUU fishing) and coordination between ICCAT and GFCM for certain topics such as drift gillnets. On its



part, the SWWAC is considering the possibility of doing the same thing and the CCRUP has decided to prepare its own advice.

The idea for the first half of 2025 is for these 4 Advisory Councils to meet and try to jointly prepare the general part of the advice, although it is not clear yet whether the section on the stocks can be drafted in the same way. More meetings will be held by the chairs and/or vice chairs of the ACs, as well as by their working groups on pelagics with the secretariats, although any decisions shall be taken in the working group of each AC.

The members participating at this point would like to congratulate the Secretariat and Chair for this initiative, hoping that there is a balanced representation of NGOs as well, including an invitation for vice chairs to participate.

The following **ACTION** is agreed:

- **The Secretariats of the LDAC, SWWAC, MEDAC and CCRUP will strengthen their collaborative links in follow-up to the actions reflected in the agreement and will keep each other informed on work priorities in the run-up to the 2025 ICCAT meeting and the calendar of meetings, and will start work on a draft advice on the general parts without prejudice to the continuation of the separate work of each Advisory Council.**

5. WCPFC- Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission.

5.1- DG MARE report on process and main priorities for the 21st Regular Session of the Commission (Fiji, 28 Nov - 4 Dec 2024)

The Chair, Ms. Mattlet, notes that the EC representatives have declined to attend to report on this item. Therefore, the following **ACTION** is agreed:

- **To include a reference to this point in the letter of complaint to be sent to the EC (mentioned under item 4.3) regarding the lack of coverage of topics.**

5.2- Open discussion and questions from the floor.

The General Secretary, Mr. Alexandre Rodríguez, informs that the draft advice on the WCPFC will be distributed again including the changes proposed by the members.

Besides, he suggests requesting the EC to hold a coordination meeting on this matter as soon as possible.

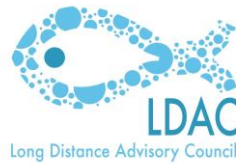
6. IATTC- Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission.

6.1- DG MARE report on outcomes of the 102nd Meeting of IATTC (Panama, 2-6 September 2024)

The EC representative, Mr. Marco Valleta, informs that the annual meeting this year was less complicated than in previous years.

He mentions the following main conclusions:

- A sound assessment of tropical tuna stocks (BET, SKJ and YFT) was carried out.
- The existing conservation and management measures on tropical tuna were rolled over for two more years with small adjustments.



- As for the measures for tropical tuna proposed by the EU and other CPCs, he highlights that they were not capable of reaching an agreement for any of them.
- He points out that the EU managed to submit a proposal on MCS measures for Pacific BFT fisheries which was similar to the existing one in the Atlantic for ICCAT. It was the first time that specific reference was made to its implementation in this RFMO, and after four years of difficult negotiations with other CPCs such as USA, Japan or Mexico.
- On FADs: he notes that a specific request was made to the Scientific Committee to obtain specific guidance on the registration of FADs (number of auxiliary vessels, supply vessels, operation, etc.).
- Regarding the EU proposal on safe handling of sharks, he notes that those were long and complicated negotiations, but that they managed to adopt it.
- In response to the question on climate change and its impact on IATTC tuna fisheries, he believes it is important to have a debate on this matter but limited to fisheries so as not to go beyond the RFMO material scope.

6.2- Open discussion and questions from the floor.

In response to the questions from the floor, the EC representative, Mr. Valleta, says the following:

- In the event that the LDAC prepares an advice on IATTC, it would be very positive to send it as soon as possible for it to be taken into account prior to the approval of the technical and political mandate of the Commission.
- It is yet to be known when the next IATTC meeting will be held, but it could be in September, so it would be optimal for the potential LDAC advice to come in June/July 2025.
- The Scientific Committee will meet in May, so they will wait for the scientific assessment and will then have a discussion with stakeholders.
- As for whether there are any developments regarding excess of capacity in the region, he notes that there have been no changes for the time being, and the positions, such as that of the USA and Japan, remain the same. They do not intend to address this matter again until there are new elements to analyse.
- As for sharks and CITES, there is no specific point on this issue, discussions on sharks are complicated, in fact, the fins-attached policy is a topic for discussion and reflection in all RFMOs that will require political attention in the future as well.
- On the allocation criteria, work is being done to reduce the catch period and that the number of closures applies to all vessels catching the same species. Furthermore, there is the capacity issue, according to which no new vessels may be registered.

After some discussion, the following **ACTION** is agreed:

- **At the next WG4 meeting in March 2025, the LDAC will consider the possibility of drafting an advice on the IATTC in order to send it to the EC negotiators at the end of June or the first week of July.**

7. RFMO possible advice or positions (jointly with Working Group 2)

7.1- Sharks



Dr. Iris Ziegler, Seas at Risk, makes a presentation that is available here: [https://ldac.eu/images/Presentation Joint Shark Advice across RFMOs October 2024 Iris.pdf](https://ldac.eu/images/Presentation%20Joint%20Shark%20Advice%20across%20RFMOs%20October%202024%20Iris.pdf)

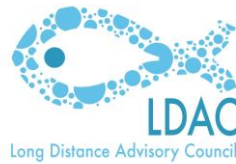
Dr. Ziegler suggests issuing a cross-sectional advice on sharks for all tuna RFMOs that is neutral and effective in promoting shark conservation and management.

Representatives of the Spanish longline sector (OPNAPA, ORPAGU, OPROMAR, OPLUGO) question the viability of this proposal and wonder if they should further focus on issues regarding compliance with existing regulations by Asian longline fleets that have a competitive advantage vis-à-vis the European fleet, since they compete with lower standards and they do not follow the rules. They also call for socio-economic considerations to be included in the proposed draft to avoid focusing solely on environmental sustainability for commercial shark species. In order to improve the scientific knowledge of these fisheries, there is a need for data (volumes of catches, discards, number of surviving and dead individuals, etc.) and for the time being only the European fleet is able to provide data on a continuous basis, and both the industrial and artisanal fleets of the other countries should also be included. The European fleet has also implemented an electronic observer programme with on-board cameras, and it is currently developing the fisheries improvement project FIP BLUES.

Moreover, the aforementioned representatives note that in the framework of one of the proposals of the last IATTC meeting, there was a discussion on CMM for sharks and scientific planning in the near future for species that have been banned from fishing for the Spanish fleet for many years (hammerhead shark, silky shark, etc.). They show their opposition to the inclusion of blue shark (BSH) in this group of species in CITES Appendix II, since the BSH stock is in the green area of the Kobe plot, unlike MAKO. Finally, they insist on negotiating with the four Asian countries an effective measure similar to the fins-attached one with the establishment of a short transitional period for retaining on board separately fins from carcasses.

The representative of the Spanish General Secretariat for Fisheries (SGP), Mr. Juan Acacio, notes that it is necessary to acknowledge the efforts made by the Spanish longline fleet in improving shark conservation and management in tuna RFMOs with the implementation of both compulsory and voluntary measures, and that it would be disproportionate and ineffective to shift the pressure to only one part of the fleet, in this case the European one. Although he admits that the state of commercial shark stocks is different, a socio-economic impact assessment should be carried out before adopting new management measures based solely on the environmental pillar.

Dr. Ziegler appreciates the feedback and argues that a joint and holistic approach is required for sharks managed by tuna RFMOs, and claims that all conservation and management measures have to be applied to all CPCs, fishing gears and species, without exempting a very important part of fishing mortality such as that caused by coastal and artisanal fleets.



However, she expresses her doubts about including socio-economic considerations in the advice, since in her opinion, the LDAC should focus on environmental conservation and sustainability. This will also help to ensure that the EU is not perceived as being driven by a financial or profit motive to benefit its fleet. She expresses her openness to dialogue and willingness to find common elements regarding this issue.

ACTION: After discussion among the members, the Chair suggests that Iris send her points in writing and reflect upon how to include them in the potential creation of a Focus Group and in the preparation of a draft advice on this matter.

7.2- Discussion on level playing field in terms of operability and competitiveness of European fleets vis-à-vis non-EU fleets.

The Chair, Ms. Anne-France Mattlet, explains the idea of preparing an advice on the competitiveness of the European fleet in all RFMOs, analysing the level playing field. She suggests this work be carried out together with Working Group 2.

After asking the members for their views on the matter, the following **ACTION** is agreed:

- **The Chairs of WG1 and WG2 (also relevant for bilateral agreements with North East Atlantic third countries) will work together to develop a position on the development of an advice on the competitiveness of the European fleet in all RFMOs, analysing the level playing field. This item will be added to the agenda of the next WG1 meeting to be held in March 2025.**

The two new items that have been added to the agenda are then addressed:

- **Code of Conduct for European delegates attending RFMO meetings**

The Chair, Anne-France Mattlet, informs and summarises the specific Code of Conduct for representatives attending RFMO annual meetings as members of the EU delegation (thus excluding observers). The said code is available on this link:

https://ldac.eu/images/Code_of_conduct_EU_delegates_at_RFMOs_meetings.pdf

After some discussion among the members, the following **ACTION** is agreed:

- **The LDAC will send a brief letter to the EC with all their questions and doubts regarding this code requesting clarification on their role in future RFMO meetings.**

Ex post note: the letter was sent on 5 November 2024 and the reply from DG MARE services arrived two days later.

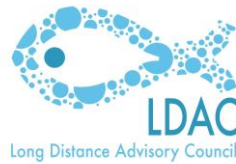
Both letters are available on the LDAC website:

- LDAC letter (5 November 2024):

https://ldac.eu/images/LDAC_letter_on_clarification_Code_of_Conduct_for_EU_delegates_at_RFMO_meetings_5Nov2024.pdf

Reply from the Commission (7 November 2024):

https://www.ldac.eu/images/EC_Reply_letter_Ch_Vitcheva_to_LDAC_-_code_of_conduct_nov_24.pdf



- **Feedback from the Director General for Fisheries, Ms. Charlina Vitcheva, at the Inter-AC coordination meeting with DG MARE (4 October 2024).**

The Chair, Ms. Mattlet, explains that Director Vitcheva publicly criticised the "behaviour" of the delegation representing the European fleet at the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) meeting in terms of their dialogue with third countries such as Kenya. For this reason, Europêche sent a follow-up letter in protest to this public statement to clarify the situation and give their views.

In order to inform all the members about this situation, the following **ACTION** is agreed:

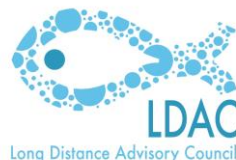
- **Europêche will make the above-mentioned letter available to all LDAC members for their information.**

Closure of the meeting

With no other issues to address, the meeting is closed by the Chair thanking everyone for their attendance, and the interpreters and the secretariat for their work.

She recalls that the next WG1 meeting will be held in March 2025 in Brussels, the date soon to be confirmed by the Secretariat.

-END-



ANNEX 1. LIST OF ATTENDEES

LDAC Working Group 1 — Highly Migratory Tuna and Tuna-like Stocks and their RFMOs Tuesday, 15 October 2024, 10:00-13:00

WORKING GROUP MEMBERS

1. Anne-France Mattlet. Européche Tuna Group
2. Ignacio Fresco. OCEANA
3. Angela Cortina. Opnapa / OPP3/ Acemix / Agarba
4. Michel Goujon. ORTHONGEL
5. Iván López. AGARBA/CEPESCA
6. Julio Morón. OPAGAC
7. Vanya Vulperhorst. OCEANA
8. Rob Banning. PFA
9. Julien Daudu. EJF
10. Béatrice Gorez. CFFA-CAPE
11. Iris Ziegler. Seas at Risk
12. Héctor Fernández. Bolton Food
13. José Manuel Beltrán. OPP-Puerto Burela
14. Anertz Muniategi. ANABAC
15. Nikolas Evangelides. The Pew Charitable Trusts
16. Daniel Voces. Européche
17. Juan Martín Fragueiro. OP ANACEF
18. Raúl García. WWF
19. Michael Earl. CFFA-CAPE
20. Juana Parada. ORPAGU
21. Despina Symons. EBCD
22. Joelle Philippe. CFFA-CAPE
23. Margaux Rochefort. CFFA-CAPE

OBSERVERS

24. Marco Valleta. DG MARE
25. Ignacio Granell. DG MARE
26. Gorka Merino. AZTI (Zoom)
27. Josu Santiago. AZTI (Zoom)
28. Juan Acacio. SGP (Spanish Fisheries Secretariat - MS)
29. Laura Jordão. CC RUP (Zoom)
30. Marcia Piron. MEDAC (Zoom)
31. Rosa Caggiano. MEDAC Executive Secretary (Zoom)
32. Daniela Costa. CCRUP Executive Secretary (Zoom)
33. Bertrand Wendling. MEDAC Chair of Pelagic WG (Zoom)
34. Neil Ansell. EFCA
35. Hanna Richardson. Flora y Fauna

LDAC SECRETARIAT

36. Alexandre Rodríguez. LDAC Executive Secretary
37. Manuela Iglesias. LDAC Policy and Communications Officer.
38. Marta de Lucas (Zoom)