



Recommendations in relation to Atlantic Tuna and Tuna-Like Stocks ICCAT Annual Meeting – Marrakech, 14-21 November 2017

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R-06-17/WG1

1. General and structural issues

The LDAC wishes that the amendments related to ICCAT Convention are finally adopted to expand its scope on species coverage and incorporate sharks so they can be fully considered as directed-regulated fisheries subject to the potential adopted of management measures.

The LDAC would also like to reiterate to the EU its proposal of developing a regional observer programme at sea at ICCAT to coordinate MCS for coastal countries, and would like to recall that the LDAC is developing some work with the African Conference of Ministers for Atlantic (ATLAFCO-COMHAFAT) in this area. The sectorial support on the SFPAs and DG DEVCO funding could be utilized for such purposes.

2. Recommendations on specific stocks

SWO-ATL North Atlantic Swordfish (*Xiphias gladius*)

Management recommendations by SCRS

North Atlantic

SWO-ATL-Tables 2, 3 and 4 show, respectively, the probabilities of maintaining the stock in the green quadrant of the Kobe plot, maintaining $B > BMSY$ and maintaining $F < FMSY$, over a range of TAC options for North Atlantic swordfish over a period of 10 years. The current TAC of 13,700 t has a 36% probability of maintaining the North Atlantic swordfish stock in the green quadrant of the Kobe plot by 2028, whereas a TAC of 13,200 t would have a 50% probability, and would also result in the biomass being above BMSY with a probability greater than 50%, consistent with Rec. 16-03 (SWO-ATL-Table 3).

The Committee also recognizes that the above advice does not account for removals associated with the actual mortality of unreported dead and live discards, quota carryovers (15% in the North Atlantic), quota transfers across the North and South stock management boundaries nor the total cumulative quota, which includes that allocated to "other CPCs" and would fall above the TAC if achieved. The Committee emphasizes the importance of this uncertainty particularly given that the current estimated biomass is close to BMSY.



South Atlantic

SWO-ATL-Tables 5, 6 and 7 show, respectively, the probabilities of maintaining the stock in the green quadrant of the Kobe plot, maintaining $B > B_{MSY}$ and maintaining $F < F_{MSY}$, over a range of TAC options for South Atlantic swordfish over a period of 10 years. The current TAC of 15,000 t has a 26% probability of rebuilding the South Atlantic swordfish stock to within MSY reference levels by 2028, whereas a TAC of 14,000 t would have a 50% probability of rebuilding the stock.

The Committee also recognizes that the above advice does not account for removals associated with the actual mortality of unreported dead and live discards, quota carryovers (30% in the South Atlantic) nor quota transfers across the North and South stock management boundaries. The Committee emphasizes the importance of this uncertainty particularly given that the current estimated biomass is lower than B_{MSY} .

Considering that

- The SCRS recommends to reduce the TAC from 13,700t to 13,200t for North Atlantic Swordfish; and from 15,000 to 14,000t for South Atlantic Swordfish. This would allow to achieve a 50% probability of staying in green area of Kobe Plot and SSB to be above B_{pa} ;
- Stronger and more robust data are needed given the problems to incorporate this year the most reliable and well documented observer programme from Instituto Español de Oceanografía (IEO) in Spain;
- The actual catches are well below the existing TAC, as there are different levels of distribution and consumption of quotas between CPCs;
- There is a certain degree of uncertainty linked to the assessment as there are data gaps related to unaccounted-unreported removals, quota transfers and carry-overs;
- The EU fleet applies a flexibility rule that allows to retain as by-catch 15% of individuals below the minimum landing size established (in number of individuals) within its declared catches so it does not need to discard that fraction of its catches;

The LDAC recommends,

In light of the existing gap between the TAC recommended and the actual level of catches, the proposed administrative reduction would render the measure ineffective in practice for the biological sustainability of the stock but it would create a disproportionate burden and a detrimental socio-economic impact for the EU longline fleets targeting this species, as a proportional reduction would be applied to a quota that it is near full utilisation.



In view of this, the LDAC advocates for a “roll over” of the TAC for both of the Swordfish stocks, i.e. 13,700 t for North Atlantic and 15,000t for South Atlantic Swordfish.

ALB - Atlantic Albacore Tuna (*Thunnus alalunga*)

Management recommendations from SCRS

North Atlantic

Recommendation 16-06 sets the objective of maintaining the stock in the green area of the Kobe plot with a 60% probability while maximizing long-term yield, and, if $B < B_{MSY}$, to recover it as soon as possible, while maximizing average catch and minimizing inter-annual fluctuations in TAC levels.

In 2016, the Committee noted that the relative abundance of north Atlantic albacore had continued to increase over the last decades and was likely somewhere in the green area of the Kobe plot. However, without additional information, the magnitude of the recovery was not well determined and remains sensitive to many different assumptions. This undermined the ability of the Committee to reliably quantify the effects of future TAC or HCR scenarios on the status of the stock, until more sources of uncertainty and the robustness of the advice were evaluated in the future through MSE and/or benchmark stock assessment after accumulating sufficient new information. The projections assuming catch levels similar to those observed during the last five years (between 25,000 t and 30,000 t) or the current TAC (28,000 t) suggested that biomass would continue to increase and are likely sustainable. Based on the analyses conducted in 2016 as well as in 2013, the Committee believed that the current TAC would maintain the long-term objectives of the Commission as specified in Rec. 16-06.

Given the uncertainty around the current stock status and the projections, the Committee was unable to provide advice on risks associated with an increase in the TAC. Therefore, the Committee did not recommend an increase of the TAC based on the 2016 assessment. Further, the Committee reminded the Commission that our ability to monitor changes in stock abundance is currently limited due to incomplete fishery dependent information. Thus, it is desirable to pursue alternative fishery independent tools to provide improved bases for monitoring stock condition.

Although the SCRS will continue working in reviewing and improving the MSE for northern albacore, the MSE simulations conducted in 2017 allows the Committee to provide advice that is robust to a wide range of uncertainties, including those affecting the 2016 assessment. The performance of the HCRs is measured according to the indicators adopted by Panel 2 (Rec. 16-06 annex 2).



However, it should be noted that the Committee has identified several concerns in the evaluation of HCR performances, but has not yet been able to fully characterize the implications for the implementation of the selected HCR. As there is currently no clear indication that any of these concerns is sufficient to preclude the HCR implementation, the Committee agrees that the Commission could select a HCR based on the current results presented here and, according to Rec. 16-06, set an annual constant TAC for the following 3 years.

However, the Committee cautions that any such adoption of an HCR should be done on an interim basis, contingent on future advice of the SCRS based on its ongoing review of these HCRs.

Based on the current MSE results, the implementation of any of the tested HCRs will meet the objective to be in the green quadrant of the Kobe plot (with a probability higher than 60%) (ALB-Table 2). In HCRs where maximum change in TAC of 20% is always applied (SC1), higher stability and higher long term yields are achieved, compared to HCRs where the 20% restriction for decrease is not used when $B < B_{\text{threshold}}$ (SC2). Not restricting TAC reductions improves safety and might allow quicker recoveries if the stock is really overexploited, but can also cause large unnecessary TAC reductions, or even fishery closures, when the stock is healthy but it is wrongly perceived to be overexploited.

Whichever HCR is selected, its application will result in a short-term 3 years TAC of 33,600 t which results from the maximum 20% increase from the current level; this conforms to the positive stock status estimated in the 2016 assessment. It should be noted that, as any interim HCR would directly apply to the result of future stock assessments, future TAC can change widely if the assessment results change with the incorporation of the most recent information. It should also be noted that there is an extensive work plan to validate and improve the MSE framework used in the evaluation of HCRs. In that case, the realized yield could also change in the short term if an updated HCR is adopted in the future based on such improvements.

South Atlantic

Results indicate that, most probably, the South Atlantic albacore stock is not overfished and that overfishing is not occurring. However, there is considerable uncertainty about the current stock status, and the effect of alternative catch limits on the rebuilding probabilities of the southern stock. The different model scenarios considered in the south Atlantic albacore stock assessment provide different views on the future effects of alternative management actions. Projections at a level consistent with the 2016 TAC (24,000 t) showed that probabilities of being in the green quadrant of the Kobe plot across all scenarios would increase to 63% by 2020. Further reductions in TAC would increase the probability of being in the green zone in those timeframes.



On the other hand, catches above 26,000 t will not permit maintaining the stock in the green area with at least 60% probability by 2020 (ALB-Table 3 and 4).

Considering that,

- According to SCRS, both stocks are not overfished not subject to overfish;
- SCRS has provided recommendations to develop HCR for adoption by the CPCs by 2019;
- There is a certain delay in the HCR process in the setting of reference points due to technical work of intersessional meetings.

The LDAC recommends

Given the good situation of these stocks, with all scenarios achieving more than 60% possibility of being in the green area of Kobe diagram, it is advisable an increase of the TAC up to 20% in relation to that of the previous year.

The LDAC advocates for a speed up of the scientific process leading to the setting and adoption of Harvest Control Rules (HCR) for this fishery as well as related management measures for this year already. If not possible, the 20% increase in the TAC should remain in any case given the state of the stock within safe biological limits.

The LDAC would also be supportive, as requested by SCRS, of a research project to look for HCR methodologies as well as for an independent scientific review of this process on 2018, if requested by other CPCs.



YFT, BET, SKJ - Tropical Tuna (Yellowfin, Skipjack and Bigeye)

Management recommendations from SCRS

YFT Based on the 2016 stock assessment, the Atlantic yellowfin tuna stock was estimated to be overfished, but at 95% BMSY in 2014. Maintaining catch levels at the current TAC of 110,000 t was expected to maintain healthy stock status through 2024. However, 2016 catches exceeded the catch recommendation by 16%. The Commission should also be aware that increased harvests on FADs could have negative consequences for yellowfin and bigeye tuna, as well as other by-catch species. Should the Commission wish to increase long term sustainable yield, the Committee continues to recommend that effective measures be found to reduce FAD-related and other fishing mortality of small yellowfin tuna.

BET The Atlantic bigeye tuna stock was estimated to be overfished and that overfishing was occurring in 2014. Projections indicated that maintaining catch levels at the current TAC of 65,000 t was expected to recover the stock status to Convention objectives with 49% probability by 2028. However, 2016 catches (72,375 t) exceeded the TAC of 65,000 t by 11%.

The Commission should be aware that increased harvests on FADs could have had negative consequences for the productivity of bigeye tuna fisheries (e.g. reduced yield at MSY and increased SSB required to produce MSY) and, therefore, should the Commission wish to increase long-term sustainable yield, the Committee continues to recommend that effective measures be found to reduce FAD-related and other fishing mortality of small bigeye tunas. However, the Commission should be aware that increased harvests on FADs could have negative consequences for yellowfin and bigeye tuna, as well as other by-catch species

SKJ Despite the absence of evidence that the eastern stock is overexploited, but considering (1) the lack of quantitative findings for the eastern stock assessment, and (2) pending the submission of additional data (including on FADs and on the ongoing AOTTP) which are necessary to improve the stock assessment, the Committee recommends that the catch and effort levels do not exceed the level of 2012-2013 catch or effort. In addition, the Commission should be aware that increasing harvests and fishing effort for skipjack could lead to involuntary consequences for other species that are caught in combination with skipjack in certain fisheries (particularly juveniles of yellowfin and bigeye). For the West Atlantic, the Committee recommends that the catches should not be allowed to exceed the MSY. Despite recent progress, the Committee has expressed its concern regarding uncertainties which the underreporting of skipjack catches may have on the perception of the state of the stocks.



Considering that,

- ICCAT Recommendation 16-01 is currently in force, with a comprehensive set of management rules regarding technical measures such as spatial and temporal closures, limits on FADs, observer coverage and catch reporting.
- Yellowfin and Skipjack tuna stocks are in relatively good status, being the main problem the fishing mortality of juvenile Bigeye Tuna with catches been above F_{pa} trigger levels.
- Ongoing work progress is taken place carried out both by ICCAT Working Group on FADs and the Inter-RFMO Working Group (“Kobe 2 process”). This work should revert in the form of increased knowledge and questions to SCRS.

The LDAC recommends that

More focus should be put on compliance of the existing recommendation and increase efforts to fill data gaps to ensure more quality data for stock assessments and work on Management Strategy Evaluations rather than a full reopening of Recommendation 16/01 this year. 2017 and 2018 will be important to get reliable data from the impact on the stock of the technical conservation measures applied such as the moratorium (seasonal closed area) and the limit in the number of FADs for Tuna Purse Seiners in the Gulf of Guinea. It is also foreseen for 2018 the full assessment for Bigeye Tuna and efforts must be made to gather and collect missing datasets particularly from non-European longliners and purse seiners.

However, the LDAC shows concern for the lack of a comprehensive and periodic control system in the consumption of quotas and the unilateral increase of capacity by many CPCs. The LDAC considers that improving of accurate reporting on both catches and discards of tropical tuna stocks (in particular BET) is required by all the CPCs and not only the EU. Better knowledge on the contribution to each of the fleet segments (namely purse seiners, longliners, pole and line fleets...) to the overall fishing mortality of each tropical tuna species as well as improved reporting on FAD use and level of scale is also strongly advised.

The LDAC requires to SCRS to work on Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) programmes for this species, similarly to what is doing in relation to Bluefin and Albacore tuna stocks. There are currently big gaps of information for certain part of the fisheries (in particular longliners, pole and lines...) and specific allocation keys cannot be set for yellowfin or skipjack due to this reason.

The LDAC also believes that ICCAT should make progress to ensure compliance with the requirement of Rec. 16-01 to use non-entangling FADs, and support research regarding biodegradable FADs while promoting:



- **Global best practices to reduce FAD-related juvenile mortality and by-catch;**
- **Clarification of definitions and reporting instructions of FAD-related data, adopting 1° x 1° squares to facilitate SCRS data analysis;**
- **Implementation of science-based management and monitoring recommendations developed by ICCAT's FAD Working Group and joint RFMO's FAD Working Group adopting management objectives with a schedule of activities.**

Furthermore, the LDAC would like to ask the European Commission to come back with two complementary proposals to improve MCS and ensure sustainable fishing of tuna stocks:

1. The setting of a full ban on transshipments at sea. This proposal was already tabled by the EU in 2013, and the EU flag boats already are bound by an EU Regulation to land all their catches and only make documented transshipments at port.

2. Increase of observer coverage for all gears, either by human or electronic means. It must be noted that EU purse seiners already have 100% of observer coverage. The electronic observer would also serve to counteract any arguments on risk of economic profitability by other CPCs or even operational problems by non EU longliners due to the lack of space on deck.

The LDAC believes that both measures would greatly benefit due to four reasons:

- 1. Economic profit of port activity to coastal states as the transshipment activities would be transferred from sea to the coastal ports.**
- 2. Increased and real control of the fleets and catch data reporting, in coherence with the implementation phase of the FAO Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA), which has been supported by ICCAT.**
- 3. Better scientific information, collecting useful data for estimating abundance indexes through more reliable CPUE.**
- 4. Contributing to fight illegal, undeclared and unreported (IUU) fishing activities, and curb forced labour practices in ICCAT Convention Area.**



SHK - Shortfin mako (*Isurus oxyrinchus*)

Management Recommendations by SCRS

For the North Atlantic stock of shortfin mako, the probabilities in the Kobe matrices indicate that to stop overfishing and start rebuilding, the constant annual catch should be reduced to 500 t or less. This will achieve the goal of stopping overfishing in 2018 with a 75% probability, but it only has a 35% probability of rebuilding the stock by 2040. Only a 0t annual catch will rebuild the stock by 2040 with a 54% probability.

The Kobe II strategy matrix (SHK-Table 3) shows the range of possible options for the Commission to consider. If the Commission wishes to stop overfishing immediately and achieve rebuilding by 2040 with over a 50% probability, the most effective immediate measure is a complete prohibition of retention. Additional recommended measures that can potentially further reduce incidental mortality include time/area closures, gear restrictions, and safe handling and best practices for the release of live specimens (since post release survival can reach 70%). The Committee emphasizes that there will be a need for CPCs to strengthen their monitoring and data collection efforts to monitor the future status of this stock, including but not limited to total estimated dead discards and the estimation of CPUE using observer data.

For the South Atlantic stock of shortfin makos, given the uncertainty in stock status, the large fluctuations in catch, the high intrinsic vulnerability of this species, and the depleted status for the North Atlantic stock, the Committee recommends that until this uncertainty is reduced, catch levels should not exceed the minimum catch in the last five years of the assessment (2011-2015; 2,001 t with catch scenario C1).

Considering that,

- The stock assessment is radically different from the previous one in 2012, which reflected a good status and low risk of overfishing, due to the change in methodology and catch data sources.
- Scientific assessment recommends to reduce F and accordingly annual catches from the existing 3000-4000 t to a level of 500t or less plus a retention ban.
- This would mean in practice a closure of the fishery for the EU commercial fleets targeting this stock
- This is a similar approach to the one used last year on Mediterranean Swordfish, with immediate action required
- The EU is willing to adopt a precautionary approach for cases where scientific advice recommends to stop alleged overfishing and rebuild the stock as soon as possible.



The LDAC has a divided opinion on this stock amongst its fishing sector and other interest group members and recommends, respectively:

The fishing sector of the LDAC consider the SCRS assessment for shortfin mako fundamentally flawed and not reliable due to the distorted pictures shown as a result of using the Chinese Taipei as reference fleet, which has reported since 2009 anecdotal catches of 14, 10 and 9 tones respectively.

The SCRS has widely disregarded the data coming from scientific studies made by the EU and Japan. For the EU, the Spanish scientific institute IEO has made a survey programme with extensive geographical coverage of fishing grounds for the Spanish longline fleet nearly over the last 30 years. The data obtained show stable CPUE indexes backed by report of vessel position by VMS, catch data by physical logbooks and ERS, and all transshipments made at port. According to scientific surveys from IEO, the stock is in good status and very far from collapsing.

A closure of the fishery or a measure having equivalent effects such as the one proposed, would cause a huge economic impact on commercial vessels and would mean a total loss of data for scientific research, similarly to what happen to porbeagle.

The EU longline fleet has always been proactive in proposing management measures to regulate shark fisheries, with specific proposals on catch limits, closed areas and MLS for blue shark and shortfin mako. They also remind that they complied and adapted to measures such as the retention ban for hammerhead and fox / thresher sharks. They regret that the lack of action and support by other CPCs has ended up in this draconian proposal.

The EU longline fleet would be willing to propose alternative management and conservation measures to the TAC to protect the shortfin mako stock such as:

- **Spatial and temporal closed areas during spring and summer season in the cliffs of the West African coast as they are feeding grounds for mako and there are high aggregations during that period.**
- **The setting of a minimum landing size to be agreed by CPCs.**



The NGO group of the LDAC regrets that Spanish scientific data could not be incorporated into the assessment but notes with concern that, despite efforts of EU fleet and the European Commission to regulate this fishery in the past by setting catch limits or minimum landing sizes, the reality is that no progress has been made and the last scientific advice is very worrying with very low probability of recovery of this population by 2040. In view of this, a precautionary approach should be followed until new information is available. The NGO group support the SCRS recommendation of a full retention ban for all catches of shortfin mako from 2018 to manage this fishery due to the 70% post release survival rate for this species.

EU naturally-attached shark fins policy

The LDAC recognizes the efforts made by the EU in previous years and is pleased to see that in 2016 the EU proposal was supported to implement this policy into a recommendation by a wide majority of the 51 CPCs in favour and the opposition of only 3 CPCs (namely Japan, China and South Korea).

The LDAC also notes with satisfaction the precedent that has been set in terms of adoption of the naturally-attached fins policy for sharks at other RFMOs in the North Atlantic such as NEAFC (November 2015) and NAFO (September 2016).

The LDAC therefore encourage the Commission to continue with this work and call for the adoption of the naturally fins attached policy, engaging in bilateral and multilateral dialogues seeking support of more CPCs in order to achieve the adoption of this policy also in ICCAT this year, considering the possibility for asking for a voting procedure if necessary. This would be a fundamental step for a sustainable exploitation of the shark stocks, and is considered a complementary set of measures to those already proposed for improving the traceability and management of the shark stocks.

END