



# International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas - 2017 Update

The United States and other countries from around the world tackled management challenges for tunas, swordfish and sharks at the 2017 annual meeting of International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) that concluded today in Marrakech, Morocco. ICCAT, of which the United States is a member, is an inter-governmental fisheries organization responsible for the conservation of tunas and other highly migratory species in the Atlantic Ocean. This year more than 700 delegates representing 47 members gathered to discuss a number of important measures that advance the sustainable management of these valuable species.

ICCAT members considered new scientific advice regarding the conservation and management of shared stocks of Atlantic tunas, sharks and swordfish, and the United States

proposed several measures that would ensure their sustainable management based on that advice.

ICCAT adopted a measure for western **Atlantic bluefin tuna** with a catch limit of 2,350 mt, which **results in a 17% quota increase for U.S. fishermen**. This level of catch has a high probability of avoiding overfishing in the next three years and provides for the sustainability and stability of the fishery. A measure for eastern Atlantic/Mediterranean increases allowable catch levels for 2018-2020, while maintaining fishery monitoring and control measures. For North Atlantic albacore, the U.S. quota will increase by 20% in 2018.

Advice received in October from a new stock assessment conducted by ICCAT's scientific committee concluded that the North Atlantic **shortfin mako stock is overfished and overfishing is occurring**. In response, the United States introduced a proposal to end overfishing in 2018 and begin rebuilding the stock with a time horizon that takes into account the biology of this late-maturing species. The final agreement focuses on measures to reduce fishing mortality and efforts to further strengthen data collection, while protecting opportunities for U.S. recreational and commercial fishermen to retain small amounts of shortfin mako sharks. The agreement also calls for additional scientific advice on biologically important areas and the effectiveness of various mitigation measures in increasing the survivability of shortfin mako sharks,

including circle hooks.

Finally, the agreement requires the Commission to establish a rebuilding plan with a high probability of avoiding overfishing and rebuilding the stock to Bmsy (biomass maximum sustainable yield) when it convenes in 2019.

With several co-sponsors, the United States proposed a suite of bycatch mitigation requirements that are proven to protect sea turtles, measures that are already in use in U.S.

pelagic longline fisheries. Although it received significant support, consensus could not be achieved.

The United States and several other parties urged the development of stronger measures to protect juvenile yellowfin and bigeye tunas that recruit to U.S. recreational and commercial fisheries. The management of tropical tunas will be revisited by ICCAT as a



priority in 2018. A U.S. proposal to ensure the safety of scientific observers in ICCAT's regional observer programs was designed to support data collection programs that benefit the science but did not achieve consensus. It will continue to be considered intersessionally in 2018.

Members reached an agreement for North Atlantic swordfish that lowers the total allowable catch slightly, as advised by scientists, to ensure that this stock remains at a healthy level, while protecting the historical U.S. quota share of this fishery. The United States continued its efforts to strengthen ICCAT's compliance review process and take meaningful actions in response to non-compliance. A U.S. proposal to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing through establishment of a pilot scheme for the exchange of inspectors among ICCAT members to cooperate in high seas boarding and inspection activities will be considered in 2018.

After a seven year process, and with leadership from the United States, the Commission is nearing the final stage of negotiations of amendments to the 1969 ICCAT Convention that reflect more modern principles of fisheries management, such as the precautionary and ecosystem approaches to fisheries management. The amendments will also clarify the scope of Commission's management authority, particularly for sharks, and improve the governance of the Commission.