

OUTCOMES OF THE 24th SESSION OF THE COMMISSION AND THE 4th SPECIAL SESSION OF THE COMMISSION

PREPARED BY: IOTC SECRETARIAT, 20 APRIL 2021

PURPOSE

To inform participants at the 23rd Working Party on Tropical Tunas (WPTT23) Data Preparatory Meeting of the decisions and requests made by the Commission at its 24th Session, held from 2-6 November 2020 as well as the 4th Special Session of the Commission held from the 8 – 12 March 2021, specifically relating to the work of the WPTT.

BACKGROUND

Due to the shortened nature of the meeting, as well as its virtual format, Members agreed not to discuss or adopt any new management measures in 2020. Therefore, at the 24th Session, the Commission **CONSIDERED** and **ADOPTED 0** proposals as Conservation and Management Measures.

DISCUSSION

The 24th Session of the Commission

The Commission made a number of general comments on the recommendations made by the Scientific Committee in 2019, which have relevance for the WPTT (IOTC–2020–S24–R):

Report of the 22nd Session of the Scientific Committee (SC22)

(Para. 20): The Commission **SUPPORTED** the ongoing Management Strategy Evaluation work and **NOTED** the revised workplan endorsed by the Scientific Committee in Appendix 6 of the 2019 Scientific Committee Report. The Commission particularly **NOTED** the importance of the work to specify the skipjack tuna harvest control rule as a full Management Procedure (MP) as well as the need to finalise the MP development for yellowfin tuna to provide sound management advice for this species.

(Para 23): The Commission **NOTED** with concern the current status of yellowfin tuna. The Commission also **ACKNOWLEDGED** that six other IOTC species are also listed as being overfished and subject to overfishing and that measures should be taken to address this problem.

On the status of tropical and temperate tunas

(Para. 24) The Commission **NOTED** that the current status of tropical and temperate tunas is as follows (full details are provided in Appendix 6):

Bigeye tuna

In 2019 a new stock assessment was carried out for bigeye tuna in the IOTC area of competence to update the stock status undertaken in 2016. The stock status determination changed qualitatively in 2019 to not overfished but subject to overfishing.

Yellowfin tuna

No new stock assessment was carried out for yellowfin tuna in 2019, thus, stock status is determined on the basis of the 2018 assessment and other indicators presented in 2019. On the weight-of-evidence available in 2018 and 2019, the yellowfin tuna stock is determined to remain overfished and subject to overfishing.

Skipjack tuna

No new stock assessment was carried out for skipjack tuna in 2019, thus, stock status is determined on the basis of the 2016 assessment and other indicators presented in 2019. On the weight-of-evidence available in 2019, the skipjack tuna stock is determined to be not overfished and is not subject to overfishing.

(Para. 25) Due to its strong concern regarding the status of the yellowfin tuna stock, the Commission **REITERATED** the urgency for the Scientific Committee to produce an assessment of the yellowfin tuna stock as a priority in 2021.

(Para. 26) The Commission **NOTED** the considerable use of estimated data in the yellowfin tuna assessment due to the unavailability of data from CPCs, as is the case for all species. The Commission **URGED** all CPCs to improve their data collection and reporting.

(Para. 27) The Commission **NOTED** that total catches of skipjack in 2018 (607,701 t) were 30% higher than the catch limit generated by the Harvest Control Rule (470,029 t) which applies to the years 2018–2020, and that catches have increased over the past 3 years. The Commission further **NOTED** that a new catch limit for skipjack will be calculated by the Scientific Committee in 2020 using the Harvest Control Rule (in accordance with Resolution 16/02).

Scientific Committee Recommendations

(Para. 32) The Commission **ENDORSED** the Scientific Committee’s 2019 list of recommendations as its own. The Commission **AGREED** to interpret Recommendation 22.22 as a request and **NOTED** that any purse seine fleets reporting effort as fishing hours or fishing days should begin to submit this information as ‘number of sets’, in accordance with the reporting requirements of Resolutions 15/01 and 15/02.

(Para. 33) Japan stated that it would not oppose the endorsement of the recommendations on the understanding that many of the recommendations require the Commission to note the advice provided by the Scientific Committee and endorsement of the recommendations would not imply that the Commission shall strictly follow them.

The 4th Special Session of the Commission

The Commission made a number of general comments which have relevance for the WPTT (IOTC–2021–SS4–R):

(Para. 7) The Commission **NOTED** the report on yellowfin stock status (IOTC–2021–SS4–INF12) which was presented by the Scientific Committee Chair, Dr Toshihide Kitakado (Japan).

(Para. 8) The Commission **NOTED** the current status of the yellowfin tuna stock as determined by the Scientific Committee. Currently the stock is assessed to be in the red zone of the Kobe diagram i.e. overfished and subject to overfishing.

(Para. 9) The Commission **NOTED** that critical errors in the projections and estimations for computing probabilities in the K2SM developed from 2016 - 2018 has led to the Scientific Committee not accepting these projections nor the use of the K2SM for providing management advice. The Commission also **NOTED** that F2017 was 20% above the target reference point. As such, in 2020, the Scientific Committee’s advice on the current status of the resource is that from 2018, based on 2017 data.

(Para. 10) The Commission **NOTED** that the Scientific Committee recommended that yellowfin tuna catches be reduced to a level at least below the CMSY estimate (403,000 t) from the 2018 assessment until new information based on the 2021 stock assessment and its associated projections becomes available.

(Para. 11) The Commission **NOTED** that in the 2018 Scientific Committee a workplan was developed to address the issues identified, aimed at increasing the Committee’s ability to provide more concrete and robust advice. This workplan will culminate in the 2021 assessment, at which point updated advice based on revised projections and an improved K2SM is expected to be provided to the Commission.

Discussion on possible target reduction levels for yellowfin

(Para. 21) The Commission **NOTED** the importance of using the best available data in the calculations and stock assessments and encouraged those Members who need to improve their data submissions, to work with the Secretariat.

On a way forward

(Para 34: 3rd bullet point) Yellowfin tuna catch data for 2020 (provisional when appropriate) will be submitted earlier than usual, by 1 May, for the consideration at the WPTT (DP) meeting, 10-14 May.

RECOMMENDATION

That the WPTT

- 1) **NOTE** paper IOTC-2021-WPTT23(DP)-04 which outlined the main outcomes of the 24th Session of the Commission, specifically related to the work of the WPTT and **AGREE** to consider how best to provide the SC with the information it needs, in order to satisfy the Commission's requests, throughout the course of the current WPTT meeting.