

Report from the CCSBT Observer to
the 18th Special Meeting of
International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT)
(12 November – 19 November, Agadir, Morocco)

CCSBT Observer (Japan)

44 Contracting Parties and four Cooperating non-Contracting Parties, Entities or Fishing Entities, seven non-Contracting Parties, five intergovernmental organizations and 25 non-governmental organizations attended the 18th Special Meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas.

No matter related to cooperation between ICCAT and CCSBT was discussed in the meeting.

The Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS) findings of possible improvement in the east Atlantic and Mediterranean stocks of *bluefin tuna* constituted one of the major incentives to the over 500 meeting participants, but other issues such as billfish, shark management and compliance performance were also high priorities for the Commission. With all eyes on ICCAT, the Commission lived up to its recent commitment to act responsibly by heeding the advice of its scientific community and maintaining bluefin tuna quotas at levels which would allow sustainable growth and recovery of the stock, and at the same time strengthening the control mechanisms in place. The importance of science-based management was also highlighted by the Commission's commitment to the Atlantic-wide Research Program for Bluefin Tuna (GBYP), with measures proposed to ensure steady funding for this program. Although the complexities of the issue required the final decision of the funding mechanism to be deferred until 2013, parties undertook to continue the research through voluntary contributions.

Billfish species were back on the agenda following the white marlin stock assessment in May 2012, and the new management plan set clear limits on landings of blue marlin, white marlin and spearfish.

South Atlantic *swordfish* measures were prolonged for a further year as stocks are due to be assessed in 2013.

Also up for discussion were several species of *sharks*, which resulted in the strengthening of existing conservation and management measures by ensuring better reporting.

Monitoring, surveillance and control (MCS) measures were given special attention, with the adoption of improved Port State Measures in order to close all doors to any illegal Atlantic tuna catches, and improved measures relating to at-sea transshipment.

A timeframe was determined for the final implementation of the electronic bluefin tuna catch

document scheme, and an inter-sessional meeting convened to develop, among other things, the framework for future traceability systems of other tuna species with a view to having new systems in place by 2015.

Despite the increasing complexity of ICCAT conservation and management measures – with a staggering 101 reporting requirements for many Contracting Parties in addition to the implementation of MCS measures – the Compliance Committee noted a considerable improvement in *compliance with management measures* in 2012, with only seven of the Contracting Parties being identified as having some compliance deficiencies of serious concern. Recognizing that even this number is too high, greater efforts will be made in 2013 to facilitate the submission of data and other required information.

In 2012, ICCAT spent around 222,000€ in *assistance to developing States* for capacity-building activities. These funds have been used to facilitate participation in meetings, training workshops, sampling and observer programs, and to recover historical logbook data. In addition to existing funds, a further 150,000€ has been pledged for 2013 from the Working Capital Fund, in addition to voluntary contributions, to ensure continued participation of developing States at ICCAT meetings and sustain the Commission's policy of inclusiveness.

2013 promises to be another full year for the Atlantic tuna agenda, with work to ensure the implementation of the ICCAT Regional Observer Programme for bigeye and yellowfin tuna (ROPTROP) in 2014, as well as revisions to the transshipment observer programme and the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean bluefin tuna observer programme (ROP-BFT), the switch to the electronic bluefin tuna catch document scheme scheduled for the start of the bluefin purse seine fishing season and the implementation of the new measures. As well as an inter-sessional meeting of the Working Group on Integrated Monitoring Measures, a joint Panel 2/Compliance Committee meeting will be held to review the members' bluefin management plans. Other meetings include a West Atlantic bluefin tuna working group and a meeting of a Working Group to consider amendments to the ICCAT Convention, which was drawn up almost 50 years ago. The *next annual meeting* of ICCAT will be held in Cape Town, South Africa between 18 and 25 November 2013.