



International Game Fish Association

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Recommendations to 20th Special Meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT)

The International Game Fish Association (IGFA) is a non-profit organization that represents recreational anglers throughout the world. IGFA was established in 1939, has active members in over 150 countries, is the governing body for international recreational fishing, and provides rules for ethical angling practices. Many of IGFA's members target the highly migratory species managed by ICCAT, especially marlin, sailfish and spearfish (i.e. billfish) which are primarily caught and released.

IGFA continues to have great concern about how highly migratory species are being managed on a global level. The lack of data and accurate reporting on billfish catch is of particular concern. As an organization that is committed to the conservation of game fishes and obtaining more and better data on them, IGFA has deployed 254 pop-up satellite archival tags in billfish around the world in the last five years, many of which have been in waters under this organization's purview. The information gained from this exercise is open access and available to your scientific committee and others who wish to utilize it for management purposes.

Billfish

The most recent stock assessments for blue marlin (2011), white marlin (2012), and western and eastern Atlantic sailfish (2016) indicate that all stocks are currently still overfished with overfishing occurring in blue marlin and eastern Atlantic sailfish. ICCAT Recommendation 11-13 states "*that for stocks that are subject to overfishing, the Commission shall immediately adopt management measures, taking into account, inter alia, the biology of the stock and the SCRS advise, designed to result in a high probability of ending overfishing in as short a time as possible.*" Yet, all three of these stocks have been in alternating states of being overfished and/or experiencing overfishing for three decades. While positive steps rolled forward during the 2016 commission meeting, IGFA does not feel that the TAC structure implemented in blue and white marlin/spearfish is sufficient to rebuild these stocks in a timely manner, especially given their protracted history of overfishing. According to the SCRS, the established TAC of 2,000 t for blue marlin only gives a 32% chance that the stock will not be overfished with overfishing not occurring by 2026. The established TAC for white marlin is worse, giving it a 0% chance of being rebuilt with overfishing not occurring by 2022. No ICCAT regulations for sailfish are in effect. The SCRS further warns that due to poor data, that both eastern and western sailfish stocks may have been reduced to levels below B_{MSY} . There are current no management measures in place for sailfish. As such, the IGFA recommends the Commission take the following actions:

- Reduce the harvest of blue marlin, white marlin/spearfish, and eastern and western Atlantic sailfish.
- Institute harvest control rules for sailfish that will allow rebuilding of both eastern and western stocks
- Implement a prohibition on Atlantic billfish entering into international trade. Similar legislation has recently been passed in the United States, at the request of IGFA, which bans importation of all marlin, sailfish and spearfish into the continental United States.
- Require all countries be required to use non-offset circle hooks in their longline fisheries.
- Improve the quality and quantity of biological and catch data, particularly in developing countries/artisanal fisheries.

Bluefin Tuna

The 2014 stock assessment update of eastern and western populations of Atlantic bluefin tuna suggest that current management rules are allowing both populations to grow, but the extent of recovery remains highly uncertain. However, both populations are experiencing increased fishing pressure. Therefore, IGFA recommends that the Commission:

- Take a precautionary approach in quota increase and heed the recommendations of the SCRS.
- Oppose any increase in the eastern Atlantic bluefin tuna quota until the 2017 stock assessment is released.

Bigeye Tuna

The 2015 bigeye assessment found the stock both overfished and experiencing overfishing. Yet, at last year's meeting, the Commission approved a TAC of 65,000 t that gives the stock only a 50% chance of rebuilding by 2028. There is also little evidence that Recommendation 15-01 will end overfishing and lead to a timely recovery of the stock. IGFA recommends that the Commission:

- Adopt a TAC of 50,000 t, which will give the bigeye at least a 75% of rebuilding by 2028.

IUU Fishing

- Increase efforts to reduce IUU fishing by improving VMS requirements across all managed species.
- Ban transshipment at sea until the Commission can verify that it is not facilitating IUU fishing.
- Strengthen the IUU vessel list by allowing vessels to be added at an intersessional basis.

Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) in tropical tuna fisheries

- Establish annual meetings of the FAD working group.
- Enact regulatory actions that minimize the ecosystem impact of FAD fisheries, especially unsustainable catch of juvenile tunas.

Sharks

IGFA has significant concerns over ICCAT's management of blue and mako sharks and recommends that the commission:

- Ensure sustainable fishing for shark species through adequate scientific data and, in the absence of such, prohibit the use of wire leaders, with sharks being released alive whenever possible.
- Establish definitive, precautionary catch limits for blue and shortfin mako shark species.
- Prohibit the at-sea removal of shark fins.

Recreational Fishing

Recreational angling is a growing and economically vibrant entity in many countries and we wish that ICCAT recognize both its relevance and that it may necessitate alternate management objectives than those used in commercial fisheries. IGFA kindly offers its consultation to ICCAT on recreational fisheries issues.

- Current ICCAT quota allocation and reallocation policies do not take into consideration the economic value of catch and release recreational fisheries. ICCAT contracting parties should be free to utilize quota as they desire, even if it is not fully harvested without penalty of quota redistribution.
- Managing fisheries on the basis of MSY is an excessively risk-prone approach. As such, we suggest that ICCAT adopt a target objective below MSY to compensate for biological, environmental and data uncertainties.

The International Game Fish Association is a not-for-profit organization committed to the conservation of game fish and the promotion of responsible, ethical angling practices through science, education, rule making, record keeping and recognition of outstanding accomplishments in the field of angling.

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