



International Game Fish Association

Fishing Hall of Fame & Museum

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Recommendations to 25th Regular 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, 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 over 300 pop-up satellite archival tags in billfish around the world in the last six 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. In regard to sailfish, the results of the 2016 assessment are equivocal and the SCRS has stated that: *"Both the eastern and western sailfish stocks may have been reduced to stock sizes below BMSY"*. 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 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 to use non-offset circle hooks in their longline fisheries.
- Improve the quality and quantity of biological data and catch data, particularly in developing countries/artisanal fisheries.
- Adhere to the proposed deadlines of 2018 and 2019 for updated stock assessments for blue and white marlin, respectively.

Bluefin Tuna

The 2017 stock assessment for eastern and western stocks of Atlantic bluefin tuna suggest growth in both populations since the last assessment conducted in 2014. However, the eastern stock assessment did not conclude that it has fully recovered. Furthermore, the SCRS has cautioned that uncertainties in the assessment may have overestimated abundance. In the case of the western stock, biomass estimates continue to be plagued by ambiguity regarding opposing recruitment scenarios. In addition, the strong 2003 year class is past peak biomass and there is no indication of a new, strong year class recruiting into the fishery. This combined with an increasing number of eastern fish entering the western fishery has effectively precluded managers from determining the stock's condition relative to B_{MSY} . Despite uncertainties in assessments for both stocks, the SCRS has proposed quota increases up to 36,000 metric tons by 2020 for the eastern stock and 2,500 metric tons for the western, even though such increases could lead to declines in abundance. Therefore, IGFA recommends that the Commission:

- Take a precautionary approach in quota increases in the face of scientific uncertainty that will keep both stocks on a rebuilding trajectory. Specifically, do not allow quotas over 28,000 metric tons and 1,000 metric tons for the eastern and western stock, respectively.

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, as the TAC was exceeded in 2016. IGFA recommends that the Commission:

- Adopt a TAC that will give the stock a minimum of 60% chance of rebuilding by 2024, or two generation times since the stock was declared overfished in 2015.

IUU Fishing

- Increase efforts to reduce IUU fishing by requiring functioning VMS on all authorized fishing vessels.
- 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)

The growing prevalence of FAD associated fisheries has significantly increased fishing mortality for juvenile yellowfin and bigeye tuna. IGFA recommends the commission:

- Enact regulatory actions that minimize the ecosystem impact of FAD fisheries, especially unsustainable catch of juvenile tunas.

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.