

MEDRAC ADVICE ON BLUEFIN TUNA

The MED RAC Executive Committee adopted, through written procedure*, the document approved by the Participants of the Working Group 2 (WG2). The WG2 met in Athens on October 9 to monitor the stock condition on the basis of the results of the ICCAT SCRS annual meeting and of the inspections carried out by the EFCA during the 2012 Bluefin tuna campaign, which showed a considerable reduction of the number of infringements reported for EU vessels.

The Executive Committee, while confirming what already adopted in last year opinion (Ref. N. 254/AV 24th October 2011),

Considering

That the Executive Committee favorably welcomed the last SCRS advice on the stock of the east Bluefin tuna stating:

- *“Although **the situation has improved** regarding recent catch, there are still uncertainties about population structure, migratory rates, key modeling parameters for bluefin tuna productivity and the level of IUU catch (although the Group believed that the level of IUU has strongly decreased since 2008.)”*
- *“The implementation of recent regulations through [Rec. 09-06, and previous recommendations] has clearly resulted in **reductions in catch and fishing mortality rates**. The Committee notes that maintaining catches at the current TAC (12,900 t) or at the 2010 TAC (13,500 t) under the current management scheme will likely allow the stock to increase during that period and is consistent with the goal of achieving F_{MSY} and B_{MSY} through 2022 with at least 60% of probability, given the quantified uncertainties.”*

Requests:

- to adapt TAC according to the recent scientific results reported above (unanimously agreed by the EXCOM members with the only exception of ETF*);
- to avoid the further reductions of the fleet planned for year 2013, according to the Council Regulation 302/09, chapter III art. 5 (Fishing capacity measures), par. 9, maintaining the actual fishing capacity at 2012 levels and ensuring satisfactory employment levels;
- that the purse-seiner fishing season be shifted forward by 10 days, i.e. from 26th May to 24th June;
- to revise the percentage established by the ICCAT Recommendation 10-04 for by-catches, which is currently no more than 5% of the total catch, since small-scale fishing dedicated to the capture of other target species is often involved accidentally in catching Bluefin tuna that cannot be discarded or landed in any case;



- to readmit the use of aircraft for searching for Bluefin tuna in order to promote economic sustainability of the fisheries dedicated to Bluefin tuna and to increase selectivity avoiding juveniles catches with the eventual participation of observers that might carry out scientific monitoring;

- to admit “*catch and release*” at the European level not only for sport fishery but also for recreational fishery.

*ETF voted against as its suggestion to add the following paragraph was not accepted by the other EXCOM members: “With the adjustment of the TACs we ask for the commitment to the return-to-work fishermen excluded from the production cycle due to the reduction of fishing quotas carried out in previous years. The EXCOM didn’t support this proposal because it is not something related to the EU decision-making level.

*The present document has been adopted by the Executive Committee members with the exception of WWF and OCEANA that voted against. They are convinced that it is extremely important to maintain the current management measures to allow full recovery of the stock within the timeframe of the ICCAT recovery plan, for the benefit of the stock and the fishery. Furthermore, they also want to highlight that scientist call to maintain the current situation by pointing out that “A period of stabilization in the main management regulations of the rebuilding plan would allow the SCRS to better estimate the magnitude and speed of recent trends in F and SSB in the coming years”. Due to the reasons expressed in the previous paragraph, WWF and OCEANA cannot share the requests expressed in the advice in relation to maintaining the current fleet capacity levels, which according to the SCRS is well in excess to the capacity needed to match the current TAC, to shift the purse seine fishing season, to revise the current percentage of allowed BFT by catch, and to readmit the use of aircraft in support of the purse seine fishing activity.

*There has not been consensus among the participants of the Executive Committee on the EAA suggestion of the following paragraph: “Recreational fishing for tuna should be managed in its own right independent of other tuna exploiting interests. Fish stocks are a public resource - and should remain so. The public’s access to the bluefin tuna resource (vis-à-vis a recreational fishing quota) should be ensured independently of TACs allocated to commercial exploiters. In particular to secure that recreational angling for tuna, the last sector to start fishing season, is not closed for reasons that other sectors have used up and exceeded their quotas or wish additional quota or to secure that a few individuals fishing illegally don’t cause the fishing season to end before scheduled”. The EXCOM didn't support this proposal for the reason that quota allocation among fishing sectors and segments is a national issue.

