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Roma, 5 November 2010

**Brief report of the meeting preparatory to the ICCAT plenary
Brussels, 13 October 2010**

Present: (see list in annex)

Apologies received from: Mr González Gil de Bernabé

Session chair: Mourad Kahoul

1. The chairman opened the proceedings. The agenda was approved with major changes due to the absence of the European Commission. The chairman informed the meeting that Ms Pariat, who would now be following the Mediterranean dossier at DG Mare, had been invited to this meeting but had had to decline the invitation because of another commitment. He also informed participants that the Commission had notified the RAC very late of the cancellation of the sectorial consultation scheduled for the day before and of the absence of any representative of the Commission at the present RAC meeting on bluefin tuna, despite the date and location (Brussels) having been agreed with the Commission.
2. Ms Béjar (CEPESCA) expressed the perplexity of her organization at the cancellation of the Sectorial Consultation with stakeholders despite the fact that the ICCAT plenary promised, once again, to be very difficult for fisheries undertakings. Moreover, when a meeting is cancelled at such a late stage, all travel and lodging expenses are committed and irrecoverable. She questioned whether the Commission's behaviour here respected the principle of good governance, its position being, as we learn in the press, to reduce quotas even before consulting with stakeholders. Ms Béjar asked that the RAC write to the Commission, complaining about this situation, and calling for a new date to be set as soon as possible before the ICCAT plenary. The representative of the Maltese bluefin tuna cages sector also insisted that a new consultation meeting be fixed urgently with the Commission. Vice-President Mr Oriol Ribalta, deplored the absence of Commission representatives, given that the RAC working meeting had been located in Brussels to avoid European officials having to travel. Mr Buonfiglio informed delegates that the Commission was of the opinion that the RAC could adopt an opinion regardless of the fact that it would receive no indication on the likely course of negotiations within ICCAT nor of the position that the EU would defend at that time. It was somewhat unfortunate that, since the RAC had started work in 2009, the Commission had, ultimately, never sent a representative with competence in this matter to any working meeting organised by the RAC, viz. the meeting preparatory to ICCAT in October 2009, a preparatory session prior to the CITES plenary requested in February-March 2010, and the present meeting.
3. The President then gave the floor to Mr Buonfiglio who informed delegates that various organizations - Federcoopesca, WWF, CNPMEM and PEPMA - had sent their written contributions



to the Secretariat on bluefin tuna. He presented orally the opinion of CNPMEM, not represented in the room, asking that the 13,500 t of quota, the same control measures and the same minimum sizes be maintained for the next three years, especially given the encouraging nature of the ICCAT scientific opinion. It was also asking to renegotiate the reimbursement of the over-consumption of the French quota over a six-year period, also that the quota of small French undertakings be raised to 4% of the national quota because of its low impact on the resource.

4. The Greek organization PEPMA was calling for an increase of its national quota. The Greek organization PASEGES confirmed that the national quota of 260 t was clearly insufficient. Both organizations expressed the desire for another and more severe legal framework for bluefin tuna cages and for compensation for 2007, when the quota had not been fully used owing to the early closing of the fishing season. Ms Papadopoulou asked whether some Member States had had recourse to the EFF to compensate bluefin tuna fishermen.
5. In Italy, Federcoopesca recalled the positive ICCAT scientific opinion that the bluefin tuna stock is not in danger of extinction, and therefore opposed any further reduction in quotas and fishing period. For weather reasons, it wanted the fishing season to start later and finish later. Given the drastic reduction of the fishing season, the organization was asking to be allowed to use spotter planes.
6. CEPESCA called for the 13,500 quota to be maintained, given the considerable efforts already made by the sector (stops, fleet reduction, traps, increased controls, on-board observers, declarations, etc.).
7. WWF pointed out that by maintaining the quota at 13,500 t, there was a 66% probability of the bluefin tuna stock reaching the MSY in 2022 and that therefore, given the uncertainties, it was necessary to take further measures and reduce the EU quota by more than half, to 6000 t. WWF also called for the creation of sanctuaries from 2010, and six spawning areas with a total ban on fishing in these six areas. These measures are sought for 2011 and 2012. For industrial fisheries, WWF believes that traceability is not yet sufficient despite the European controls. The organization was therefore calling for a total stop on seiners and for a TAC to be allocated in future to the small-scale fleet only.
8. There followed a debate in which the Maltese cages representative informed delegates that he had followed the scientific meetings on the issue and that the SCRS (ICCAT Scientific Committee) considered that the spawning biomass is 75%. This was very high compared with 2008, figures for which were themselves based on 2006! It was obvious that with the drastic recovery plan the stock was on the road to recovery. There was no longer any alarm and the tone of the scientific recommendations had changed. The SCRS opinion certainly did not recommend the closure of six spawning zones!



9. Mr Buonfiglio reminded delegates that the scientific report published in September (6-12/9) was presented in Madrid in October and included in the general report on large pelagics. He summarized the ICCAT recommendation, in § 7.2. This states that maintaining the quota at 13,500 t until 2013 will allow the stock to recover and achieve the desired biomass level by 2023 with a probability rate of 66%. The methods used (COB) are not perfect, hence the continuing uncertainty, especially about the starting point to be taken for the present state of the stock. There is also a time-lag between the evaluation reports and fishing activities. The RAC needed therefore to position itself on the basis of these elements and strike the right balance between those seeking an increase in their TACs, those wanting to maintain the European quota and those advocating its reduction by half, bearing in mind that a further quota reduction would lead purely and simply to the permanent cessation of the already strongly reduced 'industrial' fleet. To recap, the quota in 2007 stood at 37,000 t. In Italy, the reduction being too heavy to cushion the impact, it had been decided to adopt a moratorium and not to fish at all. From 49 existing ships, the Italian fleet segment had reduced to 29. Those keeping going were those with multi-species licences. Shipowners had not received any economic compensation. WWF's position was extreme and impractical for the industry.
10. The Chairman thanked the representative of the European Parliament, who had just joined the meeting and gave the floor to Ms Béjar who added, as information to the WWF, that Spain had only six seiners and that a further quota reduction of quota would also kill off the small-scale segment in Spain.
11. Regarding the request to increase the Greek national TAC, Mr Buonfiglio said that the proper path should be to request the maintenance of the European quota and then proceed to intra-community negotiations for Greece to try to get more, though this would be very difficult even if the current EU quota were maintained.
12. Mr Ribalta (recreational fishing) preferred not to comment on one tonnage rather than another. For him this was a matter for the scientists. He hoped that the decisions would be taken on a scientific, and not political, basis. He informed delegates that his organisation's members would continue to collaborate with scientists in stock assessment.
13. A debate followed on the issue of timing and of bad weather affecting fishing activities during the short duration of the annual fishing season. The catching sector would like for fishermen to be able to work the full number of days allocated to them and that a solution be found for bad weather.
14. Mr Buonfiglio then read a draft position of the RAC (available on the website in final version). This was the subject of some minor adjustments, with a reservation from recreational fishing on the tonnage mentioned. WWF was not in agreement on the draft opinion that would in any case be sent by written procedure to all members of the Executive Committee for final approval.





15. At the end of the meeting, Mr Buonfiglio informed delegates that the next General Assembly of the Mediterranean RAC would be held in Rimini on or around 18/2, the starting date for the Rimini Fisheries Fair. He also informed delegates that the next RAC meetings would be held on 30/11 and 1/12 (Executive Committee). The main subjects would be management plans and recreational fishing. During October-November, interviews would be held to select a Secretary-General. The outcome of the selection process would be presented to the Executive Committee in Rome, along with the updated RAC membership situation. The Executive Committee would also serve to prepare the 2100 grant application.
16. There being no more business, the chairman thanked participants for their contributions, along with the interpreters, and closed the meeting.

