



Ref: 280/REL

Rome, 15th November 2011

REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON SWORD FISH AND BLUEFIN TUNA
CORINTHIA MARINA HOTEL, MALTA 21ST SEPTEMBER 2011

The list of participants is attached to this report.

Coordinator: Mr Pedro Hernandez for sword fish and Professor Mario Ferretti for bluefin tuna

Attached documents: Agenda, slides presented by Fabrizio Donatella, Ignacio De Leiva and Antonio Di Natale.

1. The working group on sword fish and bluefin tuna met in Malta on 21st September 2011 to assess the RAC MED opinion on sword fish in relation to the proposed EC management plan, as well as to receive an update on the inspections carried out by the Community Fisheries Control Agency (CFCA). The meeting was also called to receive information on the ICCAT research programme on bluefin tuna in the Atlantic (GBYP) which aims to enhance data collection on fishery activities targeting bluefin tuna and thus improve statistical knowledge.
2. The RAC MED Executive Secretary opened the working group and thanked the participants, the associations and the Maltese ministry for their presence; the Meeting was reminded of the procedures established for the RAC MED working groups, especially concerning the double role of the coordinator in directing the group and informing the Executive Committee on the results attained. The Agenda was approved, Professor Mario Ferretti of Federcoopesca was nominated coordinator of the bluefin tuna Working Group and Mr Pedro Hernandez was confirmed as coordinator of the working group on sword fish following the meeting held in Barcelona.
3. Prof. Ferretti passed the floor to Ignacio de Leiva, representative of CFCA, who illustrated the activities of the Agency and then presented the results of the inspections carried out during the 2011 bluefin tuna fishery season. The Agency is divided into two coordination groups: a guiding committee made up of representatives of the member states and the European Commission, directed by the CFCA, which authorises all the control programmes and establishes the relative priorities; a joint development group formed by the national coordinators who are nominated by the member states. Mr de Leiva informed the Meeting on the implementation of the inspections and recalled that the Italian fleet had also actively fished using tuna purse seiners. About 180 inspectors were involved in the control programme and on the basis of ICCAT data, updated in August, a total of about 593 inspections were carried out. 56 cases of possible non-conformity were detected, these principally concerned documentation, such as missing information relative to the declarations of transfer, however the non-conformities reported could in actual fact not be validated.
4. Prof. Ferretti thanked Mr de Leiva for the clear and exhaustive description and passed the floor to Mr Antonio Di Natale, who gave the first public presentation of the ICCAT bluefin tuna management programme (GBYP), he also underlined that there are many aspects surrounding bluefin tuna that are unknown and that the capture statistics which are different for the various decades were not considered



scientifically reliable, whereas the size frequency data are at best partial. The most important initial finding of this programme has been the demonstration that the use of more efficient control methods is yielding good results, the most recent assessments show that there has been a slight recovery of the biomass and adult mortality is decreasing. Each year the GBYP programme presents official reports to the ICCAT Scientific Committee (SCRS) which analyses and approves them before submitting them to the EC and to ICCAT. The Meeting was informed that an aerial surveillance plan has been initiated independently from the data on bluefin tuna and this has been carried out on the reproductive biomass; the areas in which there is greatest concentration have been identified in order to integrate the data present in the archives and in the databases which are supplied by the ICCAT contracting parties. Mr Di Natale also informed the participants that the initial budget was larger than that which was effectively made available and therefore it will be necessary either to increase the funding or to choose between the activities to be implemented in the course of the programme.

5. Professor Ferretti thanked Mr Di Natale for the interesting presentation and passed the floor to Fabrizio Donatella, DG MARE delegate, who declared that the 2011 tuna fishery season took place in the period recommended by ICCAT and that no extension was granted due to adverse sea and weather conditions because ICCAT advice does not cover this eventuality. Mr de Leiva was thanked for his presentation and the Meeting was informed that the DG MARE inspectors managed to carry out 14 missions and they discovered problems relative to incomplete compilation of the capture data and the capture documentation.
6. Professor Ferretti thanked Mr Donatella for the information provided and passed the floor to the WWF representative. A brief presentation was made on the tuna marking campaign that was carried out with recreational fisheries in order to evaluate migratory behaviour in the western and central Mediterranean. The project demonstrated, *inter alia*, that the species is more or less permanently established in the Mediterranean.
7. The APCCR representative intervened to state that this association had also carried out a tuna marking campaign and that it is very important to choose the correct period for this activity.
8. The representative of Federcoopescas wished to underline and remind the EC that the Italian fleet had declined significantly and this had contributed to reducing fishing effort. Moreover the Meeting was requested to consider whether dedicating some financial resources to research instead of control may be preferable.
9. The Federpesca delegate asked Mr Di Natale the reasons for the budget reduction, while the same delegate asked Mr Donatella further clarification on the non-authorization of the extension to the tuna fishing season for this year. Mr Di Natale informed the Meeting that the contracting parties had defined the contribution as voluntary and as a consequence it is difficult to plan activities without knowing the entity of the funding available. Mr Donatella expressed his appreciation of the efforts made by Italy to reduce the fleet however he reminded those present that the EC has to keep to the directives established by ICCAT.
10. The CRPMEM PACA representative asked once more why the extension had not been granted even though the quota had not been reached; the importance of marking activities in collaboration with APCCR was also stressed as these had shown the positive state of the stock.
11. The AGCI Agrital delegate recalled that in the south Tyrrhenian sea there is an abundance of tuna; while agreement was expressed with the prosecution of illegal fisheries, the delegate also spoke of his opposition to the application of regulations that could create further difficulties and obstacles to fisheries
12. The PEPMA representative also informed the Meeting that the presence of tuna in Greece had increased, especially in closed gulfs in which there are many pelagic species. The question should be raised in relation to the ecological impact that a large amount of stock could have in such a small basin.



13. The EAA delegate expressed disagreement with the sale of fish captured during recreational fisheries, to support this the proposal was made that all such catch should not even be sold for charity but should be given for free. Moreover the release of live bluefin tuna caught in competitions was requested and the CEPRR representative agreed.
14. In the light of the research on tuna marking, which highlights how the reproductive period of bluefin tuna coincides with the current fishing season, the APCCR representative proposed that the season be moved to 1 – 30 June in order to improve stock sustainability, both in economic and in social terms. The Meeting was asked to express its opinion and was also asked whether the results are valid in other counties. CNPMEM, Federcoopesca and CEPESCA agreed.
15. Mr Di Natale recalled that the different marking programmes in the Mediterranean which appear to yield contrasting results actually support the idea that the situation is extremely complex and therefore it is necessary to carry out marking both pre- and post-reproduction. The “*catch and release*” system is practised in many parts of the world however much research carried out in America concludes that part of the specimens die following the extensive struggles.
16. The Coordinator, Professor Ferretti ended this part of the debate which took place with active participation of the delegates and informed the Meeting that an opinion proposal would be drafted to report the discussion and conclusions, once this has been adopted by the working group members it will be submitted to the Executive Committee.
17. The working group meeting resumed after the coffee break with the presentation by the EC representative who compared the opinion adopted by RAC MED on swordfish with that proposed by the EC which is to be presented at the forthcoming ICCAT annual session. To summarise, the EC proposal plans a TAC system to limit catches, reduce mortality, the extension of the closed season and the minimum landing size.
18. The coordinator Pedro Hernandez Mr thanked Mr Donatella and underlined how similar the RAC MED proposal is to that of the EC. The substantial differences concern in particular the extension of the closed period from two to three months and the possible introduction of TAC system. Where TAC is concerned, the SCRS has not produced indisputable scientific evidence to support the request; in relation to the closed fishery period RAC MED maintains that increasing the period is premature – reliable information on the efficiency of this measure is not available yet as the ICCAT recommendation has only been in force for two years. Moreover the socio-economic impact of this measure in the fisheries sector should not be underestimated. The debate was then opened.
19. The Federcoopesca representative intervened and expressed agreement with the coordinators comments, underlining how the application of a TAC system on sword fish would be premature given that the number of vessels effectively targeting sword fish is still unknown. The Meeting was also reminded that minimum landing sizes should allow for a percentage of tolerance.
20. The CNPMEM delegate asked why the EC proposal considers setting a number of hooks for both sword fish and for bluefin tuna and albacore as this was a proposal for sword fish only.
21. The ANAPI Pesca representative reminded the Meeting that ICCAT 2009/04 has not been transposed into a European regulation; the representative also underlined the proposal already made during the Barcelona working group meeting, in which it was suggested to intervene on fishing gear in order to safeguard juveniles.
22. The delegate from OCEANA, on the issue of closed seasons, stated that scientific data is in fact available and agreed with the EC representative on the extension of the period of closure. Furthermore, on the matter of



the list of vessels targeting sword fish, the suggestion was made to use the data in the log book. The WWF representative agreed.

23. Mr Donatella replied on the legal issues repeating that the ICCAT recommendation was notified to the Member States and was not converted into an EC regulation because it is not an opposable legal instrument. Italy, as all Member States, is obliged to transpose the ICCAT recommendation. The EC is willing to discuss the matter of the percentage of tolerance, however the closure period was extended to facilitate checks and to reduce pressure on stocks and on fishing effort. The EC did not propose 6 months, as suggested by SCRS, but only three months.
24. The Federcoopesca representative requested further clarification on the implementation of the recommendations made by international organisms, considering that, before the Treaty of Lisbon they were transposed into EC Regulations which in turn were assimilated into national law. The current practice was considered unclear and at risk of applicative ambiguity.
25. The EC delegate clarified that after the Treaty of Lisbon the procedures increased with the consequent enhanced involvement of the European Parliament. It is without doubt that a regulation concerning transposition would be very important, especially for operators in order to allow them to be fully informed on the rules in force. He concluded by acknowledging that the scientific recommendations from SCRS and STECF on the state of sword fish stocks are not alarming.
26. The coordinator, Mr Hernandez closed the meeting and thanked all the participants for their involvement in the discussion, he did not consider it necessary to draft a new opinion on sword fish as the existing one already adopted covers all the issues brought up during this working group meeting.

