

ICCAT: what's next?

Brussels, 24 November 2025

ICCAT updated catch limits and allocation for bluefin tuna, showing once again the Regional Fisheries Management Organisation's capacity to generate consensus. However, despite, or perhaps because of, the extremely high number of proposals, ICCAT ended up concentrating almost exclusively on this decision and other pressing issues were left to the shadows.

For instance, no progress was made on allocating yellowfin tuna to continue securing the long-term sustainable management of the fishery or on determining the precise fishing capacity in the Atlantic.

A last-minute bittersweet agreement on bluefin tuna

The 29th ordinary meeting of ICCAT took place from 17th to 24th November 2025 in Sevilla, Spain. This session saw the adoption of a new Total Allowable Catch (TAC) and allocation scheme for bluefin tuna. The new TAC of 48 403 tonnes represented an increase of nearly 20%, as the highest recommendation by ICCAT's scientific committee (SCRS), as a result of the stock's favourable health. ICCAT also decided to allow some new entrants in the fishery: Mauritania, Namibia, Panama and Senegal.

From the European industry, it is a mixed outcome, explains Javier Garat, President of Europêche: *"The bluefin tuna TAC increase gives less additional quota than expected to European fishers, which have made tremendous efforts. Also, we cannot ignore the trade-offs: the EU has reduced its share to accommodate new claims, creating uncertainty in a fishery made up of a wide and diverse fleet, and creating a worrying precedent. We are especially concerned about Senegal's new allocation, given the serious compliance issues raised this year regarding its management of tropical tuna quotas."*

New management measures adopted

On a positive note, ICCAT successfully adopted a management procedure, detailing long-term harvest strategies, on North Atlantic Swordfish and another one for western Atlantic skipjack tuna.

Concerning stagnation in the tropical tuna fishery

The high expectations from the tropical tuna fishing industry for ICCAT were all frustrated. European tuna fleets have long invested in the Atlantic fishery with a long-term vision: sustainable management is necessary to keep supplying consumers with healthy and affordable products while guaranteeing safe and dignified working conditions for their crews. Maintaining viable companies operating to the highest social, control and environmental standards, like the European ones, is vital.

At this year's ICCAT meeting, three concrete decisions could have significantly strengthened that path: allocating the yellowfin TAC to prevent quota overshoots; increasing the bigeye TAC in line with SCRS advice, relieving fleets that have sacrificed heavily to rebuild the stock; and lifting the Fish Aggregating

Device (FAD)-closure, a measure disproportionately affecting purse-seiners despite the absence of scientific evidence of its benefit for the stock. None of these issues reached an agreement.

Xavier Leduc, president of Européche Tuna Group, deplores the lack of decisions: *“Unfortunately, none of the tropical tuna pressing issues, including an allocation for yellowfin tuna and the elimination of the FAD moratorium, resulted in an agreement this year, leaving our European responsible fisheries more vulnerable. We urge ICCAT Parties to use the intersessional period to find balanced, science-based solutions that protect the fishery, the companies that depend on it, and the people whose livelihood is at stake. Behind our fishing companies stand men and women, fishers and onshore teams, port workers, shipyard staff and cannery employees, whose livelihoods depend on ICCAT’s decisions”*.

Better compliance remains an aspiration, not yet an achievement

ICCAT adopted a resolution establishing a record of vessels over 20 meters. According to Anne-France Mattlet, director Européche Tuna Group, this register does not allow for determining the actual fishing capacity in the region, which is essential to implement effective management measures: *“Without crucial data on fish hold capacity in cubic meters, as recommended by the United Nations’ Food and Agriculture Organisation and applied in the Eastern Pacific, ICCAT cannot know the true capacity of the fleet. Understanding vessel capacity is essential to ensure adequate and sustainable management”*.

Compliance procedures also remain weak. The current system struggles to track non-compliance effectively: there is no clear summary document, no follow-up mechanism, and no automated process to address violations. While the European Union’s proposal to streamline reporting and follow-up has been adopted, much work remains before ICCAT can ensure robust enforcement.

Shark management frustration

No consensus was reached on the many proposals aimed at improving shark management or reinforcing the fight against shark finning. The European fleet has applied the fins-naturally-attached policy for years and continues to call for a level playing field across the Atlantic.

“Do you want ICCAT to deal with sharks?” With this provocative question, ICCAT Chair Ernesto Peñas underscored the need for the organisation to demonstrate leadership to avoid being overshadowed by bodies such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). ICCAT has progressed for certain shark species, such as blue sharks, and need to keep this approach.

ICCAT steps up as BBNJ Agreement takes effect

Although progress is limited in certain areas, ICCAT has in previous years proven its efficiency in sustainably managing Atlantic tuna fisheries. The organisation is determined to build on these achievements and to safeguard its mandate, particularly in the context of the newly ratified BBNJ Agreement, a commitment reaffirmed in a new resolution.

Jérôme Jourdain, member of the Européche delegation in ICCAT, says: *“ICCAT and other RFMOs bring decades of scientific expertise to sustainably manage high seas fisheries. Future measures under BBNJ must fully respect RFMO mandates. Otherwise we risk undoing decades of management and threatening fisheries’ vital contribution to global food security, recognized by the United Nations under the BBNJ Agreement”*.

ENDS

Press contacts:

Daniel Voces, Managing Director of Européche: +32 489 26 81 07 daniel.voces@europeche.org

Anne-France Mattlet, Européche Tuna Group Director: +33 6 78 11 63 01 anne-france.mattlet@europeche.org