



International Game Fish Association

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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 133 countries, is the governing body for international recreational fishing, and provides rules for ethical angling practices. Many of IGFA's members target the highly migratory species managed by ICCAT.

IGFA has an International Committee of Representatives in nearly 100 countries including nearly all ICCAT Contracting Party nations who have been chosen for their integrity, fishing knowledge and concern for sportsmanship and conservation. These international representatives report to IGFA on issues affecting our interests and are a primary way that IGFA participates in the international recreational fishing community.

IGFA wishes to express our appreciation to ICCAT for arranging this 17th Special Meeting of the Commission and our gratitude to the city of Paris, France for hosting. We hope that IGFA, as an observer, will be able to contribute to the management policies of the Commission so that our marine resources are managed in a sustainable manner for all users for years to come.

IGFA's primary interest in this meeting, as it has been since 2006, is the conservation of Atlantic bluefin tuna. Atlantic bluefin tuna are extremely high in demand in the international market and their incredible economic value has led to an exponential rise in their popularity which has yet to plateau over the years, even with the populations dwindling numbers. Lack of sufficient protection led to the recent consideration of listing the species under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). ICCAT's own Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS), along with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) concluded that the percentage of decline of this species is within the limit required for an Appendix I CITES listing. It is imperative that ICCAT take appropriate actions during this meeting, and prove to the world that they can properly protect Atlantic bluefin tuna and allow the stocks to rebuild.

For these reasons the IGFA is supportive of the recommendation for the creation of spawning protection areas for the Atlantic bluefin tuna. Prohibiting the take of fish in specific areas, such as spawning grounds, is an effective fisheries management tool and is regularly used to protect biodiversity, rebuild depleted populations, and protect spawning fish – all crucial goals for both the Atlantic bluefin tuna and the fishermen who depend on these fish for recreation and income. The Atlantic bluefin tuna has only two known spawning grounds, the Gulf of Mexico and the Mediterranean Sea which has six separate

spawning grounds identified by the SCRS committee. The fish's well-documented annual return to these regions makes the protection of the spawning areas an urgent priority to conserve the species for future generations of fishermen.

Additionally, it is equally important that the necessary attention be given to billfish, sharks and other tuna species which fall under the management of ICCAT. Specifically, marlin, oceanic white tip sharks, shortfin mako sharks and bigeye tuna all continue to show signs of distress.

Sharks are extremely vulnerable due to their specific life history traits as well as the high demand for their fins in the international shark fin trade. It is estimated that up to 73 million sharks are taken annually, specifically for the shark fin trade, and immediate action is necessary to prevent a collapse of their populations. ICCAT needs to pay particular attention to species such as the scalloped hammerhead, oceanic white tip and the North Atlantic shortfin mako sharks.

Marlin, particularly blue marlin and white marlin, are already overfished and overfishing is continuing in the Atlantic Ocean. These species are a particularly prized catch and release game fish species and contribute immensely to coastal communities economies. Recreational catch and release fishing for these species is a sustainable industry but if protection is not given at the commercial level then the industries that this fishery support will all be negatively affected.

All of the species that fall under the management of ICCAT are vital to a healthy ocean ecosystem. It is distressing that the commercial value of a species today can play a more important role in the management decisions than the overall health of the populations and securing their existence for future generations. A depleted fishery has no future whereas a sustainable fishery will provide greater longterm economic value to all of the ICCAT Contracting Party nations.