

**Fishing Vessel Circular Letter No. 066**  
**2 December 2024**  
**Series: RFMO-2024**

**To:** All Ship Owners, Operators, Deputy Registrars, Resident Agents, Representatives, and other Stakeholders

**Subject:** **ICCAT RECOMMENDATION 24-01 ON MULTI-ANNUAL CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME FOR TROPICAL TUNAS.**

**Reference:** Issued in accordance with Part VIII 50. (1)(a) of the High Seas Fisheries Act 2013.

**Supersedes:** ICCAT Recommendation 22-01

---

## **BACKGROUND**

Given the ongoing 15-year rebuilding program for bigeye tuna by ICCAT CPCs, which commenced in 2020 and is set to continue until 2034 to achieve a biomass at maximum sustainable yield ( $B_{MSY}$ ) with a probability greater than 50%, and in light of the ICCAT Scientific Committee's recommendation to address the fishing mortality of small yellowfin and bigeye tunas for the years 2025, 2026, and 2027, it is imperative that the Contracting Parties and other relevant entities implement conservation and management measures to ensure the sustainable management of tropical tunas. Despite the challenges faced in establishing an equitable and sustainable management framework for tropical tunas, CPCs successfully adopted a new multi-annual conservation and management program for tropical tunas in 2024. The specific measures included in the program are as follows:

## **MANAGEMENT MEASURES**

### **Bigeye Tuna Total Allowable Catch (TAC)**

The annual Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for bigeye tuna has been set at 73,011 tons for the year 2025. This TAC level will be maintained for both 2026 and 2027. However, if the stock assessment conducted in 2025 indicates a probability of less than 65%, the Commission will need to establish a new TAC. If the probability of maintaining the 73,011 tonnes TAC for 2026 exceeds 70%, the Commission may consider potential increases to the TAC, provided that the probability remains at least 70%. It is important to note that these probability thresholds are interim measures for determining the TAC over the next three years and should not be regarded as setting a precedent for future Commission deliberations. These regulations will be discontinued once the Commission establishes a management procedure (MP) based on a multi-species management strategy evaluation (MSE) process for tropical tunas.

## **Bigeye Tuna Catch Limits**

The allocation of bigeye tuna catch limits has been distributed among CPCs, Non-CPCs, Entities, and Fishing Entities, categorized alphabetically. Belize has been placed in Category B as middle harvesters. Belize's bigeye tuna allocation for the years 2025, 2026, and 2027 is established at **1,956.33 tons**.

Any overharvest of Belize's total annual catch limit for bigeye tuna will result in deductions from the catch limit of the respective CPCs before the adjustment year.

Belize has revised its quota allocation policy to align with its 2025 bigeye tuna catch limit. Individual vessel allocations will be determined based on historical catch data, fishing capacity, and fishing days. Supplemental allocations will be determined on a case-by-case basis depending on the utilization of total allocations.

## **Monitoring of Catch**

CPCs are required to submit quarterly reports to the ICCAT Secretariat detailing the quantities of tropical tunas caught by its vessels, categorized by species, within 30 days following the conclusion of the catching period. They must also provide monthly reports of all bigeye tuna caught from large-scale long liners and purse seiners (LOA 20m or greater); increasing the reporting interval to weekly upon reaching 80% of their catch limits. The ICCAT Secretariat will notify all CPCs once 80% of the bigeye TAC has been caught.

## **Yellowfin Tuna Total Allowable Catch (TAC)**

The Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for yellowfin in 2025 and subsequent years under the Multi-annual Programme is set at 110,000 tons. This TAC will remain in place until changed based on scientific advice.

Belize's updated quota allocation policy also includes yellowfin tuna catch limits based on historical catch data, fishing capacity, and fishing days.

## **Capacity Management Measures on Fishing and Support Vessels**

CPCs must furnish a list of all vessels offering part-time or full-time support services to purse seiners, inclusive of those in operation in 2019. The Secretariat will compile and report this data to the Commission for their consideration in determining the type of limitation that support vessels may be subject to in the future, which may include a phasing -out plan where required. CPCs are prohibited from increasing the number of their support vessels beyond those active in 2019 except for new participants in purse sine fisheries.

## **Management of FADs**

In order to mitigate the impact of Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) and FAD fishing on pelagic and coastal ecosystems, as well as to reduce the mortality of juvenile bigeye and yellowfin tunas that gather with skipjack on FADs, the following management measures shall apply in 2025 to 2027:

- **FAD Closure:** in 2025, a FAD closure period shall be in effect for 45 days, from **March 17th to April 30th** across the entire ICCAT Convention area. The Scientific Committee for ICCAT (SCRS) will evaluate the impact of this closure in 2025 and propose any necessary modifications or additional measures at the Commission's Regular meeting that year. If no consensus is

reached on additional measures in 2025, this FAD closure will be extended to 2026 and 2027.

- **Prohibition on FAD Deployment:** CPCs are required to ensure that their vessels do not deploy any drifting FADs at least 15 days prior to the closure period.
- **FAD Limitation:** CPCs must monitor and restrict the number of FADs with operational buoys deployed by their vessels at any given time. The verification of the number of FADs should be conducted through the scrutiny of telecommunication bills by the competent authority of the respective CPC.

**2025: 300 FADs per vessel**

**2026: 288 FADs per vessel**

**2027: 288 FADs per vessel**

- CPCs are encouraged to refrain from increasing the total fishing effort on FADs beyond the levels observed in 2018 for their purse seine vessels.
- CPCs have the option to permit their purse seine vessels to engage in fishing activities on floating objects, provided that the vessels are equipped with either a human observer or an Electronic Monitoring System (EMS). It is mandatory for CPCs to notify the Secretariat about which vessels are conducting fishing operations on floating objects.
- Purse seine vessels, bait boats, and all support vessels are mandated to record all FAD deployments, interactions, and lost FADs in their paper or electronic logbooks.

### **Non-Entangling and Biodegradable FADs**

In order to minimize the entanglement of sharks, marine turtles, or any other species, CPCs must ensure that all FADs deployed in the ICCAT Convention area adhere to the design and construction specifications outlined in Fishing Vessel Circular BHSFU-067-2024 on FADs by January 1, 2025.

### **Observers**

In the years 2025, 2026, and 2027, CPCs are mandated to maintain a minimum observer coverage of 10% on their longline vessels measuring 20 meters in Length Overall (LOA) or larger, specifically targeting bigeye, yellowfin, and/or skipjack within the ICCAT Convention area. This coverage requirement can be met by having a human observer on board or utilizing a combination of human observers and Electronic Monitoring Systems (EMS) in accordance with ICCAT Resolution 16-14, unless specific exemptions outlined in that resolution are applicable. The SCRS may recommend the use of EMS to fulfill the minimum observer percentage.

For purse seiners targeting bigeye, yellowfin, and/or skipjack, CPCs must ensure 100% observer coverage of fishing activities, either through the presence of a human observer on board or the implementation of EMS.



**Please direct all queries and concerns to:**

**Belize High Seas Fisheries Unit**

**Attn: Director of High Seas Fisheries**

[director@bhsfu.gov.bz](mailto:director@bhsfu.gov.bz)

