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FOR CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF TUNAS

Results of the ICCAT annual meeting

The annual meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) was held in New Cairo, Egypt from November 13 to 20. The meeting was held in a hybrid style (in-person and on-line). Due to security concerns in the Middle East, about one-third of Contracting Parties and Cooperating non-Contracting Parties, Entities or Fishing Entities (CPCs), mainly from the central American area, attended on-line.

The following are major outcomes of the meeting.

1. Tropical tunas

Since ICCAT adopted conservation and management measures for tropical tunas (skipjack, bigeye and yellowfin tuna) in 2019, it has been discussing amendment to the total allowable catch (TAC) of bigeye, allocation of the bigeye TAC among CPCs and management measures for fish aggregating devices (FADs). This year, ICCAT held two intersessional preparatory meetings to find agreement on these measures at the annual meeting.

With respect to the TAC, many CPCs supported 73,000 t, which is an increase of 11,000 t from the current 62,000 t, while some CPCs reserved their position, saying that the TAC level is related to effective FAD management measures.

Regarding the allocation of the bigeye TAC among CPCs, there were five groups: the group of African CPCs; the group of central American CPCs and Curacao; the group of Brazil, Japan and South Africa; the EU; and the group of Canada, the UK and the US. Each group made a different proposal and no convergence of views was found.

As to the FAD management measures, several CPCs insisted that the catch of bigeye juveniles needs to be reduced if the Commission wants to increase the bigeye TAC further as catching juveniles has negative impacts on the stock. Other

CPCs stated that the current FAD closure (72 days) is causing great trouble for their industry and they would not be able to utilize allocations fully under the current length even if the TAC and allocations increase. The fact that about one-third of CPCs attended on-line made the negotiation difficult and the meeting could not agree to any TAC change, allocation or FAD measures and decided to roll-over the current measures for one year.

2. Blue sharks

Regarding blue sharks that are incidentally caught by longline fishing, ICCAT discussed conservation and management measures for both north and south Atlantic stocks this year. For the northern stock, the Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS) conducted a new stock assessment this year, and advised the Commission that the current TAC (39,102 t) was too high. As a result of discussion, the Commission agreed that the TAC is to be reduced to 30,000 t and only developed CPCs are to reduce their allocations.

Regarding the southern stock, the Commission had previously agreed to set a TAC at 28,923 t in 2019 but without allocations. As a result, the catch had been exceeding the TAC in recent years and the SCRS recommended that the TAC should be no more than 27,711 t. After extensive discussion, the Commission agreed that the TAC is 27,711 t and allocations are to be made taking into account the average catch between 2019 and 2021, with larger reduction from such levels by developed CPCs than developing CPCs.

3. North Atlantic albacore

The Commission had previously adopted a management procedure (MP) for north Atlantic albacore in 2019. This year, the MP calculated the TAC at 47,251 t, a 25% increase from the current level (37,801 t). The Commission agreed to this figure and allocations are increased accordingly.

4. Swordfish

This year, the Commission intended to agree to an MP for north Atlantic swordfish, which would calculate a new TAC, and for that purpose held three intersessional preparatory meetings. However, the Commission could not agree to the MP and decided to roll-over the current measures for one year.

5. Atlantic bluefin tuna

Last year, the Commission had agreed to an MP for Atlantic bluefin tuna to calculate the TAC but without an exceptional circumstances protocol (ECP). An ECP is one of the basic components of an MP and stipulates rules on what the Commission shall do when exceptional circumstances not envisaged by the MP are detected. The Commission had been working intersessionally on the ECP and adopted the protocol at the meeting.

6. Climate change

The UK submitted a proposal to establish a standing working group to promote discussion in a systematic manner on possible impacts of climate change on tuna fisheries. Several CPCs stated that while the SCRS had already started considering impacts of climate change on tuna stocks and fishery management, the SCRS had a full agenda and there would not be much room for increasing its workload. As a result, the meeting agreed to hold an intersessional meeting in 2024 to discuss this issue, including how to proceed.

Results of the WCPFC annual meeting

The 20th Regular Session of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) was held from December 4 to December 8 in Rarotonga, Cook Islands in a hybrid style.

The following are major outcomes of the meeting.

1. Conservation and management measures for tropical tunas

There were several key issues related to the conservation and management measures (CMMs) for tropical tunas as follows:

- (1) Members of the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA: a group of Pacific island countries plus Australia

and NZ) stressed the disproportionate burden caused by the FAD closure in exclusive economic zones (EEZs) and requested to reduce the closure period.

- (2) Several longline fishing Members requested to increase the catch limit of bigeye tuna, given the improved status of the stock.
- (3) The US requested to stop the current special arrangement whereby its three overseas territories each transfer 1,000 t to the mainland US so that Hawaii longliners can utilize it and instead add 3,000 t for the US catch limit.
- (4) FFA Members again complained that the purse seine fisheries are 100% monitored by observers while the coverage of the longline fisheries is only 5% and proposed an increase of the longline coverage to 30%.

After extensive discussions through plenary as well as small working group meetings, the following package was agreed on and will be applied for the next three years:

- (1) The FAD closure period will be reduced from 3 months to 1.5 months in EEZs and from 5 months to 2.5 month in the high seas.
- (2) Longline bigeye catch limits will be increased in proportion to the increase in the observer coverage between 5 and 10%. If the coverage of a certain Member increases from 5 to 10%, the catch limit for that Member will be increased by 10%. If the coverage increases from 5 to 7.5%, the catch limit will be increased by 5%. It was also agreed that 5% human observer coverage shall be maintained and the increase from 5% up to 10% can be covered by human observers and/or electronic monitoring.
- (3) The US catch limit will be increased from 3,554 t to 6,554 t and the special arrangement was abolished.

2. At-sea transshipment

Possible strengthening of the CMM on the regulation of at-sea transshipment had been discussed through the intersessional transshipment working group (TS-IWG) and the TS-IWG convened several times during the annual meeting. The TS-IWG discussed several issues including the placement of an observer on board the offloading vessel in addition to the receiving vessel (carrier) as well as more detailed, frequent and expedited

reporting on transshipment activities, but no agreement was reached. As a result, it was agreed that another TS-IWG meeting would be held prior to the 2024 Technical and Compliance Committee meeting (TCC20) on the expectation that the measures would be adopted at the 2024 annual meeting (WCPFC21).

3. Labour standards

Many Members stressed the importance of this issue. However, no discussion took place on the draft CMM on labour standards during the annual meeting. The co-chairs of the Labour Standards Intersessional Working Group reported that there were differing views on the area of application and that the Working Group would like to continue discussion in 2024. It was proposed that a half-day meeting be held in June 2024 and another half-day meeting be held in conjunction with TCC20.

4. Seabird bycatch mitigation measures

New Zealand proposed that the current CMM on seabird bycatch mitigation measures be reviewed and for this purpose, an informal meeting be held in February and May 2024. Based on the outcomes of the informal discussions, NZ would submit a proposal to amend the CMM for submission to the 20th Scientific Committee meeting, to TCC20 and for approval at WCPFC21. This process was agreed to.

5. Sharks

Under the current CMM on sharks, separation of fins from bodies is in principle prohibited and, if separated, certain alternative measures are applied for storing the separated fins and bodies on board vessels. It was agreed that any Member using such alternative measures would have to provide information on how it implements the measures and monitors compliance and that based on the information, the current CMM would be reviewed and revised if necessary.

6. Climate change

The meeting agreed to consider possible impacts

of climate change on fisheries and existing CMMs.

Announcing the mibyo effect of selenoneine – Increase your longevity genes with dark-colored tuna meat!¹

On November 14th, the “Research Group on Mibyo² Improvement Effect of Tuna” (chaired by Mr. Hiroshi Yamamoto), established at the Miura Chamber of Commerce and Industry (chaired by Mr. Kintaro Suzuki) in Miura City, Kanagawa Prefecture, Japan, held a kick-off event at Fisherina Wharf “Ururi” to demonstrate the effectiveness of tunas for improving mibyo. As a result of clinical trials that began in 2021, it was confirmed that the antioxidant selenoneine, which is abundant in tuna’s dark-colored meat, has the effect of improving mibyo, creating new value for Misaki³ tuna as a healthy food, and thereby promoting regional revitalization.

In his opening remarks, Chairman Suzuki stressed, “We want the utilization of tuna’s dark-colored meat to contribute to the prosperity of the local economy, including the fishing industry and tourism industry.” Miura Mayor Hideo Yoshida enthusiastically said, “We hope to utilize the dark-colored tuna meat for tourism and medicine, highlighting a new charm of Misaki tuna.”

At the research presentation session, Mr. Takuya Seko, a researcher at the Fisheries Technology Research Institute, the Japan Fisheries Research and Education Agency, presented the results of his research on the functionality of selenoneine. In addition to its powerful antioxidant properties, it has also been confirmed to prevent colorectal cancer and suppress melanin synthesis. As to the content ratio of selenoneine in bigeye tuna, he explained that dark-colored meat contains 92 times more selenoneine than red meat. He emphasized that eating dark-colored tuna meat can be expected to improve health.

Mr. Kazuo Yudo, Director of the Institute of Medical Science, St. Marianna University, announced the results of Japan's first clinical study to verify the effectiveness of selenoneine. It was confirmed that people who continuously ate tuna

¹ This article is a translation of an article from the Suisan-Keizai Newspaper with the addition of footnotes 2 and 3 by the OPRT. Reproduction of this article without the permission of the company is prohibited.

² *Mibyo* is a Japanese word meaning a condition that is not diagnosed as a disease but still causes someone to be unwell.

³ Misaki is a fishing port in Miura City where many tuna longliners offload tunas.

(particularly dark-colored meat) had a decrease in oxidative stress, which is a cause of arteriosclerosis, cancer, and aging. The study also revealed that eating dark-colored meat three times a week for three weeks increased by 20-30% the production of long-life gene proteins (sirtuin genes) that keep cells throughout the body youthful.

Mr. Kazushige Usui, a senior researcher at the Planning and Research Department of the Kanagawa Prefectural Fisheries Technology Center, promoted dark-colored meat as an attractive health food, although it is prone to discoloration and is difficult to handle. As a way to utilize dark-colored tuna meat, he proposed the provision of dark-colored meat dishes and “mibyō improvement stays.” In addition to providing high-quality sashimi and dishes at Misaki's restaurants, work on establishing quality standards, developing processed products, and creating certification systems and marks will follow.

A tasting event was also held on the day, where food prepared by Misaki's restaurants and processors was served. Chairman Yamamoto said, “There is a bad impression of dark-colored meat, but I want everyone to try it at least once. I want to turn this town into one where those who visit as sightseers can improve their health by eating dark-colored meat deliciously prepared by local chefs.”

The local restaurant “Matsubara” served sashimi of dark-colored bigeye tuna meat. Seasoning with soy sauce or sesame oil and salt is the recommended way of eating it. The dark-colored meat carefully selected by Misaki's middlemen has no odor at all. “Kaishu” has been serving “dark-colored meat steak escargot style” and it has been loved for over 30 years. “Kurobatei” presented “Italian-style cutlets of dark-colored meat” made with seasonal Miura vegetables and “dark-colored tuna meat stew in balsamic vinegar” flavored with blueberries. Both are sold at the restaurant.

Turn waste longline into a resource – agreement concluded between amu Co., Ltd. and Hokkatsu⁴

amu Co., Ltd. in Kesenuma City, Miyagi Prefecture, Japan, is working on up-recycling waste fishing gear. On November 2nd, the company (President: Kodai Kato) signed a partnership agreement with the Miyagi Prefecture Northern Tuna Fisheries Association (Hokkatsu; association president: Hiroaki Katsukura). The used main lines and branch lines from distant-water tuna longline fishing are collected and recycled into nylon material.

Fishing gear that is replaced due to damage or deterioration during longline fishing operations cannot be disposed of during the voyage, so it is brought back to Japan and has to be disposed of by a specialist company for a fee as industrial waste. Kesenuma is the home port for the largest number of distant-water longline fishing vessels in Japan, and the volume of used fishing gear is also large. In November 2021, President Kato explained a business plan for recycling waste fishing gear to the Hokkatsu Board of Directors. He created a path to receive donations of discarded lines that had been piling up in the warehouses of various companies, and has already successfully recovered and recycled over 10 tons of discarded fishing gear at no cost to fishermen.

Through this partnership, more people involved in the fishing industry will be able to utilize amu Co., Ltd.'s waste fishing gear collection service and promote further resource recovery.

“I want you to take on this challenge from Kesenuma and spread it to the rest of the country and the world,” said Mr. Katsukura, giving his support to the project. In response, Mr. Kato expressed his desire to build on these achievements and expand the circle to include fishermen across the country and around the world.

amu Co., Ltd. sells recycled nylon materials under the brand “amuca®.” According to Mr. Kato, chemical recycling produces a nylon material that has the same quality as virgin material and can be used in a variety of nylon products, resulting in a “circular economy” with a high recycling rate.

⁴ This article is a translation of another article from the Suisan-Keizai Newspaper. Reproduction of this article without the permission of the company is prohibited.