



DRAFT MINUTES

37th Meeting of LDAC Working Group 1 Highly Migratory (Tuna and Tuna-like) Stocks and their RFMOs

**Tuesday, 10 March 2026 – 14:30-17:30h CET / GMT+1
Venue: Hotel Martin's Brussels EU, Blvd. Charlemagne 80, 1000 Brussels**

Chair: Anne-France Mattlet / Vice-Chair: Ignacio Fresco

1. Welcome by the Chair.

The WG1 Chair, Ms. Anne-France Mattlet, welcomed members, observers, scientific experts and representatives of the European Commission to the meeting. She thanked participants for their attendance and opened the meeting recalling the importance of timely scientific and stakeholder input for the preparation of LDAC positions on tuna RFMOs, as well as meaningful interactions with DG MARE.

2. Adoption of the minutes from the last WG1 meeting – Brussels, 14 October 2025.

The minutes of the previous WG1 meeting were adopted without comments or amendments.

3. Adoption of the agenda.

The agenda was adopted as circulated by the Secretariat.

4. Presentation on state of stocks for tropical tuna in RFMOs: particular focus on ICCAT and IOTC.

Dr Gorka Merino (AZTI) presented the latest overview of the main tropical tuna stocks, with particular attention to ICCAT and IOTC. He reported that approximately 97% of the tropical tuna stocks global catch came from stocks that were neither overfished nor subject to overfishing, illustrating the generally positive biological status of the main tuna stocks.

- Indian Ocean bigeye tuna (BET) had improved from the red to the orange area of the Kobe plot and was close to the target biomass reference point. The status of Indian Ocean yellowfin tuna (YFT) had also been reassessed using a revised abundance series, confirming recovery although less strongly than suggested by the 2024 assessment.
- On the management measure, the role and duration of FAD closures and the importance of respecting catch limits were discussed.
- Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) work will continue in 2026. For ICCAT tropical tunas, the MSE process takes account of technical interactions among fisheries. An online Panel 1 meeting on 30 March was expected to review progress and provide guidance.



WG1 members asked about the effectiveness of FAD closures and in particular the one in the Atlantic Ocean; the calendar of scientific work; and the implications of management procedures for mixed fisheries. Dr Merino noted that it was not demonstrated that closures alone had reduced juvenile mortality in ICCAT CA and stressed the importance of compliance with catch limits. He also confirmed that blue shark MSE forms part of the ICCAT work plan, although the process remains under development. WG1 members further referred to the need to preserve the role of RFMOs in the context of BBNJ implementation.

5. IOTC – Indian Ocean Tuna Commission.

5.1. Discussion on draft LDAC advice on IOTC – tuna stocks, swordfish and sharks

The discussion on IOTC built on the scientific presentation and focused on the management of tropical tunas, the application of management procedures and the interaction between catch limits and technical measures. Members noted the recent progress in IOTC management, including the skipjack management procedure, while warning on the need for adequate data across fishing gears and for effective implementation by all CPCs.

Particular attention was given to SKJ, BET and YFT. The meeting noted that the skipjack management procedure had not been evaluated at the 2025 session as previously expected. Members also discussed the need to assess gear impacts, while recognising limitations in the availability of data outside purse-seine fisheries. The importance of maintaining scientifically sound catch limits and avoiding unnecessary duplication of measures was underlined.

5.2. Way forward

WG1 agreed that the LDAC advice should continue to be informed by the latest scientific assessments and MSE work. Any future LDAC advice on tuna RFMOs should include developments on tropical tunas, swordfish and sharks, and address implementation and level-playing-field considerations across fleets.

6. WCPFC – Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission.

6.1. DG MARE debriefing on outcomes of the 22nd Regular Session of the Commission

Mr. Stamatios Varsamos (DG MARE lead negotiator) debriefed members on the WCPFC Annual Meeting held in the Philippines on 1–5 December 2025. He thanked the LDAC for its written input submitted in due advance, which had been useful in informing and preparing the EU position.

- South Pacific albacore: a management procedure was not adopted and implementation discussions could not be concluded. The stock is of limited direct relevance to the EU distant-water fleet.
- Tropical tunas: renegotiation of the tropical tuna measure was postponed until 2027, meaning that the existing arrangements will continue in 2026. Work on a management procedure for BET is expected to advance through dedicated workshops, with active EU participation.
- Sharks: A recommendation for alternative measures to fins naturally attaches was adopted promoted by Japan, with requirements for reporting. The overall measure will be revisited in 2026 and the EU will remain vigilant and ask to eliminate alternatives to FNA when they are not effective. Some positive progress was made on silky sharks to help with recovery of stock and reduction of fishing mortality.



- Seabirds: revised mitigation provisions were adopted following work led by New Zealand, with adjustments intended to make the measures operationally applicable across fleets.
- High Seas Boarding and Inspection (HSBI) scheme: there is a binding measure already in place that has worked well with several CPCs deploying inspections in high seas for many years and also complying MCS. Voluntary guidelines were adopted to harmonise implementation of the existing binding inspection scheme, including procedures, evidence gathering and good practice. Spain and France contributed to this work.
- Electronic monitoring: WCPFC continues to increase observer coverage, particularly for longline fleets where human observer coverage is low. The work plan includes validation of national electronic monitoring programmes and development of a regional EM programme over the coming three years.
- Transshipment: attempts to strengthen controls and reduce opportunities for at-sea transshipment again failed to achieve agreement. DG MARE noted continuing momentum among some parties in favour of stronger restrictions.

WG1 members asked about shark measures, the status of inspection rules, electronic monitoring, links with IATTC and the future of at-sea transshipment. DG MARE reported positive but incomplete progress on shark conservation, including silky sharks, and clarified that the high-seas inspection scheme itself is already binding; the newly adopted guidelines are intended to improve consistency of implementation.

6.2. Overview of WCPFC advice (16 October 2025) and 6.3. Way forward

Members recalled the main elements of the LDAC advice submitted ahead of the WCPFC meeting and agreed on the value of continuing early preparation for future sessions, with particular attention to management procedures, electronic monitoring, compliance, sharks and control of transshipments, amongst others.

7. ICCAT – Atlantic Ocean.

7.1. DG MARE debriefing on outcomes of ICCAT 25th Special Meeting and work priorities for 2026

Mr. Stijn Billiet, lead EU negotiator and DG MARE Head of Unit B2 on RFMOs, debriefed WG1 on the ICCAT meeting held in Seville in November 2025. Discussions in Panel 2 on Bluefin tuna allocation required substantial time and efforts, while progress in several horizontal governance and shark files remained difficult. Some advances were nevertheless recorded in other areas, including marlin management, data flows and the establishment of a list of active vessels.

- Yellowfin tuna: an intersessional process with Japan is addressing YFT allocation. DG MARE referred to the scientific work presented by AZTI and indicated that an allocation agreement could affect the discussion on the duration and design of the FAD closure.
- Western Skipjack tuna: a management procedure was adopted.
- FAD closure for tuna purse seiners in ICCAT Convention Area: The issue was due to be discussed further at the preparatory meeting for the ICCAT Panel 1 intersessional session.



- Sharks: discussions on Atlantic shortfin mako and fins naturally attached (FNA) policy measures produced limited progress. The consolidated shark measure was again not adopted. DG MARE nevertheless saw scope for further intersessional work and confirmed its intention to continue engaging on this file.
- High Seas Boarding and Inspection: progress remained limited, although an intersessional process led by Canada was established. DG MARE considered the file worth continued investment despite the difficult negotiating context.
- Compliance: ICCAT contracting parties discussed the need to improve the functioning and clarity of the Compliance Committee, including the volume and assessment of documentation before meetings.
- Catch Documentation Scheme and beneficial ownership: DG MARE noted that further technical work is needed. The existing CDS is fit for purpose but requires flexibility, and discussions on beneficial ownership remain complex. Work is also ongoing to align IMO-number requirements with other regional fisheries bodies.

WG1 members thanked DG MARE for their negotiation work and welcomed certain elements of the 2025 outcomes and reiterated the importance of progress on shark conservation, with reference to the adoption of a management measure for trap lines for longliners targeting swordfish and mako. Representatives of the EU longline sector highlighted the practical value of adopted measures and called for continued support for FNA-based approaches and timely transposition of marlin measures. Questions were also raised about the pace of blue shark MSE, which DG

7.2. Overview of LDAC advice submitted in September 2025.

The WG recalled the LDAC advice submitted ahead of the ICCAT meeting and considered how the 2025 outcomes should inform priorities for 2026, notably on tropical tuna management, sharks, compliance, MSE, monitoring and governance.

7.3. Update on Inter-AC work cooperation for 2026 and 7.4. Way forward

LDAC WG1 Chair and Executive Secretary provided an overview of the work cooperation in the last months and reviewed the follow-up to the coordination meeting between the 4 interested ACs, namely LDAC, MEDAC, CCS and CCRUP.

The DG MARE representative, Mr. Stijn Billiet, stressed that each Advisory Council retains autonomy over its own advice and that the timing and quality of stakeholder input are more important than whether advice is issued jointly or separately.

The CCS Chairs of GA/EXCOM and WG on Demersal Species and the MEDAC Secretary recognised the value of collaboration while noting the practical difficulty of aligning calendars and internal processes and agreeing on the importance of keeping ACs individual autonomy. The CCRUP Secretary noted that she would give an answer after the holding of its WG meeting the following week.



The discussion identified two practical requirements for future cooperation: a common calendar of relevant meetings and deadlines, and a clearer framework for work of future joint Focus Groups so that interested stakeholders can agree topics and exchange views before drafting begins.

ACTION: The LDAC WG1 Chair and Executive Secretary will prepare and circulate all LDAC and ICCAT meetings calendar to share with the participating Advisory Councils so that each AC can add its relevant dates and deadlines.

ACTION: The coordinating Inter-AC Secretariat should convene an information meeting on potential joint topics and develop clearer working arrangements / possible Terms of Reference for an Inter-AC Focus Group.

Closure of the Meeting

The Chair thanked members, observers, Commission representatives, scientific experts, interpreters and the Secretariat for their contributions and closed the meeting at 17:30h.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS AGREED

- IOTC – Continue preparation of LDAC advice on tuna stocks, swordfish and sharks, taking account of the latest scientific assessments, MSE work and implementation issues.
 - WCPFC – Maintain early preparation of 2026 priorities, notably on management procedures, electronic monitoring, sharks, compliance and transshipment.
 - ICCAT - wait for scientific advice and try to prepare the 2026 priorities and advice to be ready in due time.
- Inter-AC collaboration:
- Circulate a common meetings calendar among participating ACs and organise an information meeting to identify possible joint topics.
 - Clarify working arrangements and consider Terms of Reference before launching any potential joint drafting work.