

**MINUTES OF WORKING GROUP 2 (WG2) ON SMALL PELAGIC SPECIES
ATHENS, HOTEL PRESIDENT, 9TH October 2012**

Participants – see attached list

Coordinators: Pedro Hernandez for swordfish and Prof. Mario Ferretti for Bluefin tuna.

Annexed documents: Agenda, slides presented by Ignacio De Leiva, George Tserpes and Tomas Vega Fernandez.

1. WG2 on pelagic species met in Athens on 9th October 2012 in order to analyse the results of the monitoring work carried out in 2012 by the European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA) on bluefin tuna in the Mediterranean and also to examine swordfish fishery activities in 2012 in the light of the scientific results produced by the ICCAT Scientific Committee (SCRS). The meeting also aimed to prepare the management proposals to be presented to the EC in view of the forthcoming annual ICCAT meeting.
2. The RAC MED Executive Secretary opened the session and thanked the participants, the associations and the representatives of the Greek ministry for their presence, and in particular PASEGES for having provided the meeting room and the meals. The aims and procedural rules of the Working Group were recalled, she also reminded the Meeting that Pedro Hernandez of CEPESCA had had been nominated as the coordinator for swordfish and another representative, Pedro Maza, (also from CEPESCA) was proposed, and Mario Ferretti who is the coordinator for bluefin tuna. The Agenda was approved with no changes and so the meeting began.
3. Mr Ferretti gave the floor to the representative of the EFCA, Ignacio de Leiva. Before presenting the results of the inspections carried out during the 2012 tuna fishing season, he reminded the Meeting that the creation of the EFCA has not altered the role and duties of the Agency and that control, inspection and surveillance are the responsibilities of the Member States. The Agency coordinates the work of the Member States by means of Joint Development Plans (JDP), so as to deploy the necessary equipment and human resources for control and surveillance at sea. In 2012 roughly 176 ICCAT inspectors were used in operations carried out in collaboration with the JDP; 546 inspections were performed in total. 36 possible cases of non-conformity were registered, most of which concerned documentation, (in 2008 there were 90). There were fewer cases of infringement by EC countries if compared to the other ICCAT members; the results also demonstrate that over time there has been an improvement in general respect for regulations.
4. The coordinator thanked Ignacio de Leiva for his presentation and gave the floor to the other participants for any questions. Federcoopescas requested quantification of the cost of the control programme in force for Bluefin tuna as well as the number of infractions registered. The ETF representative asked the EFCA if the socio economic impact deriving from the reduction in the fleet and consequently the relative fishery activities had been taken into consideration. Mr De Leiva informed the Meeting that the EFCA is about to carry out a study into the real costs of the control process; where the infractions are concerned, he reminded those present that the Member States are responsible for monitoring and therefore each MS

should operate according to national law. Where the last question is concerned, Mr De Leiva recalled that the EFCA only deals with inspection, evaluation of the socio-economic impact is the responsibility of other groups, both at European and at national level. Where fleet monitoring operations are concerned, the Anapi Pesca representative requested that the same attention should be given to the uncontrolled and illegal fisheries of Bluefin tuna and large pelagics in general, by vessels without fishing licences and/or *ad hoc* authorisation, which significantly affect Mediterranean stocks. For the most part these are high-sea fisheries carried out by private yachts which then take the specimens landed (tuna, swordfish and albacore) to fish markets for sale, thus entering in conflict with professional fisheries. This is unacceptable for Anapi Pesca.

5. The coordinator passed the floor to George Tserpes, the director of the HMCR (national centre for marine research) on the island of Crete; Mr Tserpes is also the rapporteur for the ICCAT working group on Mediterranean swordfish. He summarised the results of the ICCAT Scientific Committee (SCRS) that had met just a few days previously, and confirmed that the SCRS data show that the resource is recovering. A Federcoopesca representative, who also participated in the annual meeting of the SCRS as a RAC MED observer, informed the Meeting that the models applied to describe the stock demonstrate that the levels of spawning stock biomass are rapidly increasing while fishing pressure is decreasing. The Scientific Committee, however, upheld the opinion that these models are based on inexact data and that the technological approach is inadequate, therefore no clear indications for the future could be given. Lastly, he communicated that the GBYP research programme on tuna had experienced a substantial delay due to EU funds being cut.
6. Several participants intervened, expressing their perplexities on the actual recovery of the stock in such a short time, they also hoped that the same procedures as those followed by ICCAT for Bluefin tuna would not be followed for swordfish in the Mediterranean, in particular given the economic consequences. The WWF representative was pleased to hear that the stock had recovered; she underlined that the SCRS report is designed to confirm the results presented and the achievements to date are thanks to the joint efforts of the fisheries sector, it is necessary to increase these efforts in order to achieve the aims set. The APCCR representative expressed his belief that the improvement registered in the spawning stock biomass is mainly due to the introduction of minimum landing sizes and he wondered whether it would be beneficial to modify the other technical measures planned. The PASEGES representative informed the Meeting that the Greek coastal fishers targeting Bluefin tuna struggled to comply with the ICCAT measures, which entailed the demolition of fishing vessels and a substantial reduction in employment.
7. The coordinator proposed the rapid drafting of a RACMED opinion, so as to present it at the coordination meeting between the EC and the sector, scheduled for 18th October; he also asked the participants present for any matters they wish to see included. The APCCR representative proposed that the seiner fishing season be postponed 10 – 15 days. The Federcoopesca representative suggested that the quotas assigned should be readjusted according to the scientific assessments which have emerged; restoring the use of aeroplanes to detect the presence of shoals of Bluefin tuna so as to economise on management by fishing selectively. The ETF representative requested the assessment of the effects of unemployment and the losses suffered by the fishing industry following the constant reduction of quotas in

recent years. The AGCI AGRITAL representative requested an increase in the by-catch quota, because longliners often accidentally fish tuna specimens. The CEPESCA representative would like to see the current quota increased to 26 000 tons. The OCEANA, WWF and EAA representatives expressed the opinion that any changes to the TACs would be premature because the Scientific Committee has declared that there is some uncertainty concerning the data available and a period of stabilisation was requested. The Lega Pesca representative expressed his agreement with Federcoopescas concerning the use of aeroplanes in fisheries because it is efficiency that makes the productive system more economically viable. The Lega Pesca representative expressed full agreement with Federcoopescas on the use of aeroplanes in fisheries; where the AGCI AGRITAL proposal is concerned, agreement was expressed on the need to adjust the quotas for by-catch. The CNPMEM representative suggested that fishing capacity should be readjusted rather than seeing a reduction in fishing activities themselves. The EFSA representative would like to see recreational fisheries granted the possibility to use the "Catch & Release" method all year round, regardless of the established bluefin tuna fishing seasons. This fishing practice is sustainable and has no impact on the quotas (TAC). She also requested a guarantee from the EU that all interested parties would have the right to fish according to the allocated TAC. Before moving on to the next agenda item it was agreed that, in order to ensure approval of the opinion on Bluefin tuna by the Comex, this document would be drafted in English only and sent out before 18th October, the date of the coordination meeting in Brussels between the EC and the stakeholders.

8. On conclusion of the discussions concerning bluefin tuna, the Executive Secretary gave the floor to George Tserpes, who presented the results of the ICCAT working group on swordfish in the Mediterranean. A slide show demonstrated that, in 2008, mortality was the lowest registered in recent years. The current situation is not satisfactory in that stocks have decreased considerably due to over-fishing. The following management scenarios were presented: 1) in the current conditions, in 2020 stocks will return to 1985 levels; 2) a closed season of 2 months would increase this level; 3) a 20% reduction in capacity, therefore of the fleet, could guarantee satisfactory results; 4) if a low quota were introduced, 11430 tons (lower than this year's production) in 2020 stocks may return to satisfactory levels. These scenarios are based on data from the most recent stock assessment carried out in 2012 with data from 2008. The next stock assessment is scheduled for 2014. The presentation ended with the hypothesis that, in order to return to 1985 levels, swordfish fisheries should be closed for at least 6 months.
9. Mr Pedro Maza, coordinator for swordfish, thanked Mr Tserpes for the exhaustive picture concerning swordfish and passed the floor to the participants. The Federcoopescas representative recalled that ICCAT recommendation 11-03 does not limit the closed season to 2 months (October and November), it also plans for a third month to be organized between February and March as well as other detailed measures that should have been translated into a European regulation. The OCEANA representative declared that the measures within the recommendation have not been adopted into national law, for example there is no exhaustive list of fishing vessels which catch swordfish. The CEPESCA representative wished to wait for the 2013 assessment and recalled that the longliner fleet has decreased significantly, and also that the consequences of the socio-economic impact should be taken into consideration. The Anapi Pesca representative proposed once more, on the basis of the aims of the previous

ICCAT recommendations as well as recommendation 11.03 (protection of swordfish juveniles), that the high-impact longline albacore fisheries should be suspended in the autumn months rather than stopping swordfish fisheries altogether. He further proposed that benefits should be paid to the fishing enterprises involved and their crews, while allowing longline swordfish fisheries to continue capturing standard size swordfish. The question arose of how it is possible to continue seeing large amounts of swordfish in European fish markets in the autumn months, which come from the Atlantic, Pacific or even from the North African countries of the Mediterranean. The Lega Pesca representative reminded the Meeting that RACMED had already made its position on this matter perfectly clear and a document was produced by WG2 in Barcelona. He also underlined that only after the application of ICCAT recommendation 11.03 and the subsequent evaluation of the results obtained will it be possible to speak of quotas for swordfish, and then only if the results are judged to be insufficient. The AGCI AGRITAL representative reminded the Meeting that typically artisanal fisheries are versatile in the gear used and adapt to different situations. In many countries, such as the USA, it is not possible to import fisheries products that have been captured using systems that are not legally recognized in the importing nation. It was suggested that the EU could adopt similar restrictions for swordfish that comes from countries that do not apply the same rules as those for Member States. The OCEANA representative underlined that it is not possible to prohibit imports as this would go against the WTO. However the Meeting was reminded that the EC regulation against illegal fisheries requires that imports that can be proved to originate from illegal activities can be blocked.

10. Mr George Tserpes attempted to reply to the various interventions and informed the Meeting that decisions and regulations that are elaborated are not always in line with the scientific assessments. Recommendation 11-03 has never been discussed in the framework of the SCRS, indeed, the fact that some measures, such as minimum landing sizes that can cause problems and this point has been made frequently. Where fishing closure in March is concerned, the Meeting was informed that this too does not have any scientific backing that would prove its efficiency. It is necessary to attempt to discover the best way to achieve a stable biomass level. To assess 2014 it is necessary to have data available for 2013.
11. The Executive Secretary thanked the coordinator for swordfish and gave the floor to Tomas Vega Fernandez a researcher from IAMC CNR, Mazara del Vallo, Italy, who used slides to illustrate the impact of gas and crude oil extraction platforms in the Mediterranean. Before starting he underlined that little is understood about the impact of such activities, it is necessary to carry out laboratory experimentation because it is difficult to obtain data in the open sea. The Mediterranean basin is subject to many different influences from various sources and the organisms present show little resistance to such influences. The Mediterranean is full of internet connections, telecommunications cables and submarine electrical networks. There is little information on the characteristics of this technology, but some of the more noticeable consequences include the death or disappearance of marine mammals and all migratory species (turtles and squid), which occur close to the electromagnetic activity associated with the exploration of oilfields. The conclusion was that the areas in which fishery activities are possible are becoming progressively smaller with the consequent social impact on the sector. The most worrying aspect is that the companies in

question make agreements directly with the relative governments with no public consultation, no transparency and no stakeholder involvement.

12. The Secretary thanked Mr Fernandez for the detailed presentation and passed the floor to the participants. AGCI AGRITAL expressed appreciation for the presentation especially given that recently in Sicily, thanks to the awareness campaign and the attention given to this issue by the population, the associations, the Sicilian government and by Greenpeace, the authorisation to drill offshore in the Messina area was revoked. The WWF representative requested further information on the relative legislation, but there are no international treaties, the only one is the IMO but it does not cover international waters. The main problem is that, although conventions have been signed by many Mediterranean countries, these are of little use in the absence of surveillance measures. The Federcoopescas representative expressed his concern on learning that there is no chance of taking positive action if there is no baseline legislation. Moreover the situation is made worse by the fact that, as the Meeting was informed by Mr Fernandez, all research on the issue is still far away from providing significant results. In Italy, and in particular in the Adriatic, the area available for fisheries operations is notably reduced by the presence of platforms and oil pipelines. The IFSUA representative asked RAC MED to support this kind of presentation in order to evaluate the impact of activities that have nothing to do with fisheries but which influence fisheries resources.
