

## OCEANA RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK FOR MEDITERRANEAN SWORDFISH

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of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT). Istanbul, Turkey



© OCEANA. Swordfish captured with driftnets. Morocco, August 2011.

Management of Mediterranean swordfish has repeatedly been neglected to the detriment of the species. The ICCAT Standing Committee for Research and Statistics has assessed this stock as overexploited, with spawning biomass below sustainable levels and with 50-70% of catches comprised of juvenile fish.

Little is known about actual levels of fishing mortality in this fishery due to substantial underreporting of catches and illegal fishing. Illegal driftnetting for swordfish and albacore by countries such as Italy, Morocco and Turkey plagues the Mediterranean Sea.. Furthermore, some ICCAT Contracting Parties such as Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and Israel could be involved in swordfish fisheries but are not reporting their catches to ICCAT or UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

The complete absence of real management measures makes the Mediterranean swordfish fishery an open access one. Therefore, the adoption of a comprehensive management plan for Mediterranean swordfish must become a priority for ICCAT Contracting Parties.

Oceana recommends a set of management measures and accompanying sanctions in cases of non-compliance be included in a Recommendation to amend ICCAT Rec. [09-04], which is currently in force. In addition, science-based management measures for Mediterranean albacore should be adopted within the same plan, due to the high level of interaction between the two fisheries, ensuring coherence in management.

Oceana strongly recommends the following measures for the establishment of a sustainable Mediterranean swordfish management plan:

## A.- Fleet management



© OCEANA/ Keith Ellenbogen. The Italian purse seiner *Maria Antonietta*, authorised as catching vessel for Mediterranean swordfish.

The authorised vessels list established under ICCAT Recommendation [04-09] and in force since 2010, has been demonstrated to be useless for proper fisheries management. In 2010, 12,979 vessels were declared as catching swordfish while total catches declared of this species were 13,430 t, therefore catches would be equivalent to something more than a tonne per boat.

Mediterranean swordfish are fished with longines (70 percent of the cases) and driftnets (currently banned). However, current vessel lists include vessels ranging from bottom trawlers to large tuna purse seiners, highlighting the fact that **current vessel**

**authorisations are well above the true capacity of the fleet<sup>1</sup>**.

Oceana believes that amending the current ICCAT Authorised vessel list is an essential component of any management measures for the stock, and that without an amended list, any other measures are meaningless. The marine conservation organisation calls upon ICCAT CPCs to:

- Authorise **only surface longlines and harpoons** to carry out directed fisheries for Mediterranean swordfish or carry out directed fisheries to other ICCAT species, and capturing Mediterranean swordfish as by-catch.
- Put in place a measure establishing that no further amendments to the vessel list should be accepted after the deadline for the submission of vessel lists to the ICCAT Secretariat, until the next fishing year.
- Identify those vessels among the Mediterranean surface longline fleet, already reported to the ICCAT Secretariat under Recommendation [09-04], that actively capture Mediterranean albacore.

## B.- Managing the fishery

A set of management measures ensuring the recovery of the stock and its sustainable exploitation should be included in this overarching plan. Therefore, Oceana calls on ICCAT CPCs to adopt the following measures:

- Adopt a Total Allowable Catch (TAC) with a 20% reduction of the average yield of the last decade, following ICCAT SCRS Recommendations.
- Agree on a TAC allocation key, based on catch



© OCEANA/ Keith Ellenbogen. Undersized swordfish auctioned in Malta.

<sup>1</sup> For further information see Oceana working document providing an overview of the SWO-MED fleet. March 2011. [http://eu.oceana.org/sites/default/files/euo/OCEANA\\_WorkingDoc\\_Recommendations\\_SWO-MED\\_Nov2011.pdf](http://eu.oceana.org/sites/default/files/euo/OCEANA_WorkingDoc_Recommendations_SWO-MED_Nov2011.pdf)

declarations from the past 3-5 years, to avoid encouraging over-reporting by fleets.

- Request the ICCAT SCRS to perform yearly capacity assessments of the Mediterranean swordfish fishing fleet, and to consider capacity reduction plans accordingly, with the objective of striking the appropriate balance between fishing possibilities and the fleet.
- Establish a Minimum Landing Size (MLS) based on the most recent scientific information and biological characteristics of this species, namely, age at first maturity.

**If catch-at-size data provided by SCRS show that the established MLS is insufficient, due to the level of overexploitation of the stock, a larger MLS should be adopted with a commitment for gradual increases over the coming years, once the stock recovers.**

- Establish compulsory juvenile by-catch mitigation measures based on scientific research, such as an increase of fishing depth and hook sizes, to ensure compliance with the MLS.
- Establish fishery closures for the most critical stages of the spawning and recruitment periods, in order to effectively reduce fishing efforts in those Essential Fish Habitats identified for Mediterranean swordfish, and to mitigate by-catch of juveniles. These closures should be distributed over two periods, covering spawning (when maximum fishing effort is deployed), and recruitment.

### C.- Securing compliance



© OCEANA/ María José Cornax. Driftnets in the port of Bagnara Calabra. Italy

Non-compliance is endemic within Mediterranean fisheries, and Mediterranean swordfish fisheries are one of the most iconic examples of this point. In addition to substantial misreporting of catches by most of the Mediterranean CPCs, illegal driftnetting is still widespread in the basin, even eight years after ICCAT Recommendation [03-04] banning the use of this gear entered into force.<sup>2</sup>

Oceana believes that any management measures adopted should be accompanied by a sanctioning system with the goal of the fully eliminating the culture of non-compliance in swordfish fisheries. The system

should:

- Include an appropriate sanction mechanism to guarantee compliance of those CPCs that continue to disregard the driftnet ban, in breach of ICCAT Recommendation [03-04]. This mechanism should include the possibility of action by the ICCAT Compliance Committee.
- Ensure that those CPCs that do not report ICCAT Task 1 and 2 data by the required deadline will not be allowed to carry out active fisheries for Mediterranean swordfish and associated species in the following year.

<sup>2</sup> For further information, read Oceana reports:

- Swordfish and driftnets in the Mediterranean Sea (2009) <http://eu.oceana.org/en/eu/media-reports/publications/adrift-swordfish-and-driftnets-in-the-mediterranean-sea>
- Italian driftnets: Illegal fishing continues (2008) <http://eu.oceana.org/en/eu/media-reports/publications/italian-driftnets-illegal-fishing-continues>
- The use of driftnets by the Moroccan fleet (2006) <http://eu.oceana.org/en/eu/media-reports/publications/the-use-of-driftnets-by-the-moroccan-fleet>