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Opinion 108* relating to the management of northern albacore tuna

Context:

- ICCAT Recommendation 13-05, relating to the recovery of northern albacore tuna, will expire at the end of 2016, at least as regards the definition of the fishing opportunities. New levels must therefore be fixed for the coming years.
- Last year, the ICCAT adopted Recommendation 15-04, aimed at managing this stock in a pluriannual framework, on the basis of an exploitation rule. This same recommendation required the performance of a number of scientific studies in 2016, so as to allow a decision at the next plenary session.
- Many scientific studies took place this year: assessment group in Madeira in Spring, Meeting of Sub-Committee 2 in Japan during the summer, in order to present the most reliable and up to date information possible to the SCRS and to the decision-makers at the next plenary session.
- The current TAC of 28,000 Tonnes was determined within the framework of a stock that was recovering. Now, even though it is agreed that the precise quantification of the state of the stock is complicated, the direction is clear. All the indicators of the fishery (CPUEs, etc.) and scenarios based on assessment are positive, with biomass levels which have increased over the last few years. The situation of the stock has improved from a qualitative point of view.
- There is considerable variability from one year to another in the catchability of this species, due particularly to its migratory paths, which has resulted some years, in a partial consumption of fishing opportunities.

Analysis data:

- According to the last report of the SCRS, the stock of northern albacore tuna has a 96.8% probability of falling within the green zone on the Kobe diagram, at a level which is therefore very much greater than the target objective in Recommendation 15-04 (60%). With an F/F_{pme} ratio of 0.54 in 2014, this stock is, in all likelihood, underexploited, and production is thus far from being optimised.
- According to this same report, the level of uncertainty related to the forecasts means that further study would be advisable. Consequently, these forecasts were not used to draw up the management recommendations. However, the Committee noted that the new forecasts suggest higher levels of sustainable catches as compared with those of most of the previous assessments. Thus, it is estimated that the target objective (60% probability of being in the green zone in 2020) were compatible with the application of fixed TACs levels of up to 48,000 Tonnes. Also, the maximum level of production is assessed at 37,000 Tonnes.
- It is clear that scientific expertise must be reinforced for this stock. The framework for the assessment of this stock is limited, due to the non-validation of





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the catch forecasts. Moreover, the report of the SCRS also stipulates that "additional work is necessary" to assess all the possible exploitation rules.

Recommendations:

- SWWAC is pleased about the work carried out to enable the implementation of a long-term management framework for northern albacore tuna. However, it thinks it is premature to adopt an exploitation rule this year, in view of the scientific work that is yet to be carried out.
- SWWAC recommends the adoption of a TAC for 2017 equal to 32,000 Tonnes, while awaiting the publication of the new scientific work. This level of TAC would correspond to an increase of 14% in the fishing opportunities and would allow the continuation of the increase in its levels of abundance in the future. It is proposed in compliance with the report of the Working Group of Madeira, which stated that all increases in the TAC would have to be precautionary. We also note that this desired level is at the same level as the maximum estimated production during the previous assessment (31,680 Tonnes).
- From 2017, and every year thereafter, it would be desirable for the Members of the Committee to assess the scientific studies that have recently been carried out, in partnership with all the stakeholders involved in the management of this stock, so that it can be managed with a long-term strategy as quickly as possible.
- SWWAC encourages all decision-makers to provide the Scientific Institutes with all the means considered necessary to ensure the reliability of the assessment procedure of this stock, and the adoption of an exploitation rule.
- SWWAC would like to point out that it considers the mechanisms enabling fishing opportunities to be stabilised to be extremely important. It hopes that the current provisions allowing inter-annual flexibility in the management of fishing opportunities will remain unchanged. It also wishes to point out at this stage, that the appropriate period of time for the recovery of this stock, if this is necessary, should be 6 years.

** Opinion adopted by the Executive Committee, during the period of suspension of the activity of the environmental NGOs in the SWWAC.*

