



**COMMISSION
FIFTEENTH REGULAR SESSION**
Honolulu, Hawaii, USA
10 – 14 December 2018

POSITION STATEMENT TO WCPFC

**WCPFC15-2018-OP06
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Submission by International Game Fish Association



International Game Fish Association

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Recommendations to the 15th Regular Session of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission

The International Game Fish Association (IGFA) is a non-profit organization that represents recreational anglers throughout the world. IGFA was established in 1939, has active members in over 150 countries and provides rules for ethical angling practices. Many of IGFA's members target the highly migratory species managed by WCPFC, especially marlin, sailfish and spearfish (i.e., billfish) which are primarily caught and released.

IGFA has great concern about how highly migratory species are being managed on a global level for recreational anglers. The lack of data and accurate reporting on billfish catch is of particular concern. As an organization that is committed to the conservation of game fishes, IGFA has deployed over 350 pop-up satellite archival tags in marlin around the world in the past seven years, many of which have been in the area under this organization's purview. The information gained from this exercise is available to your scientific committee.

Billfish

Striped Marlin

The IGFA's primary concern for the 15th Regular Session of the Commission is the status of striped marlin. According to the last stock assessment (2015), the WCNPO stock has experienced a long-term decline in population biomass and the stock is currently overfished and experiencing overfishing. Spawning stock biomass is estimated at 1,094 t, or just 39% of SSB_{MSY} . Fishing mortality on the stock is exceptionally high and the stock has been experiencing overfishing since 1977, with the exception of two years. Current fishing mortality is 49% above that necessary to achieve F_{MSY} . Still, with the stock both overfished and experiencing overfishing, no target or limit reference points have been established by the WCPFC. As such, a robust rebuilding plan for this stock is necessary.

The Scientific Committee has noted that in order for the stock to rebuild, the catch needs to be reduced to less than 2,850 t. Due to the severely depleted nature of the stock, the IGFA recommends that catches be limited to no more than 2,500 t to give the stock a reasonable chance of rebuilding and to take into account uncertainties with catch reporting. In addition, the IGFA supports the Northern Committee's recommendation that additional reduction scenarios should be explored if the probability of reaching the rebuilding target is not at least 60%. The IGFA also strongly supports the Northern Committee's recommendation to make developing a rebuilding plan for striped marlin a priority for the WCPFC.

Black Marlin and Sailfish

No formal stock assessments exist for sailfish and black marlin. Better data collection is necessary for these species so that their true abundance can be accurately estimated.

General Recommendations

Although primarily a commercial bycatch species, billfish are highly sought after recreational species that are primarily caught and released. Recreational fisheries for billfish also yield significant economic benefits at the regional level. As such, the IGFA recommends that all countries be required to report dead discards and use circle hooks in their longline fisheries to reduce fishing mortality and improve the survival of released fish.

The International Game Fish Association is a nonprofit organization committed to the conservation of game fish and the promotion of responsible, ethical angling practices through science, education, rule making, record keeping and recognition of outstanding accomplishments in the field of angling.

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