



**COMMISSION**  
**NINETEENTH REGULAR SESSION**  
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**RECOMMENDATIONS TO WCPFC19**

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**WCPFC19-2022-OP03**  
**9 November 2022**

International Game Fish Association (IGFA)



# International Game Fish Association

300 Gulf Stream Way, Dania Beach, Florida, 33004 U.S.A.

Phone: (954) 927-2628 • Fax: (954) 924-4299

## **Recommendations to the 19<sup>th</sup> 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 125 countries, is the governing body for international recreational fishing and advocacy, is accredited by the United Nations Environment Programme, and provides rules and education 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.

The IGFA continues to have great concern about how highly migratory species are being managed on a global level. The lack of data and accurate reporting of billfish catch is of particular concern. As an organization that is committed to the conservation of game fishes and obtaining more and better data on them, IGFA has deployed over 500 pop-up satellite archival tags on billfish around the world in the last eleven years, many of which have been in waters under this organization's purview. The information gained from the [IGFA Great Marlin Race](#) is open access and available to your scientific committee and others who wish to utilize it for management purposes.

### **Recreational Fishing**

Recreational angling is a continuously growing and economically vibrant entity in many countries and we wish that WCPFC recognize both its relevance and that it may necessitate alternate management objectives than those used in commercial fisheries. IGFA kindly offers its consultation to WCPFC on recreational fisheries issues and recommends the Commission:

- Current WCPFC quota allocation and reallocation policies do not take into consideration the economic value of catch and release recreational fisheries. WCPFC contracting parties should be free to utilize quota as they desire, even if it is not fully harvested without penalty of quota redistribution
- Managing fisheries on the basis of MSY is an excessively risk-prone approach. As such, we suggest that WCPFC adopt a target objective below MSY to compensate for biological, environmental and data uncertainties

### **Billfish**

Although billfish are primarily caught as bycatch in commercial fisheries, they are highly sought after recreationally and represent an important economic resource to many countries where recreational fisheries are present. Because of the bycatch nature of billfish in many fisheries, a directed statistical data collection program has not been successful in allowing some species to be assessed such as sailfish and black marlin. The importance of billfish species to recreational catch-and-release fisheries and the economic value they generate should be justification to focus on expanding knowledge and data collection on all billfish species especially in regard to life history parameters and catch estimation.

The IGFA recommends the Commission:

- Set target reference points that give stocks a greater than 50% chance to fall within the green region of the Kobe plot within 10 years
- The North Pacific striped marlin stock is overfished and experiencing overfishing. Spawning stock biomass remains significantly under MSY levels even with fishing mortality near  $F_{MSY}$  in recent years. The stock is not recovering at current catch levels which is a sign something more must be done to ensure striped marlin numbers improve. The level of catch and effort in fisheries interacting with striped marlin must be known accurately. Life history traits used in assessment methodology such as growth parameters require additional research to improve future assessments. A further reduction in

catch is necessary after the failure to rebuild the North Pacific striped marlin stock. Limit reference points must be developed and adhered to if we hope to see any improvement in striped marlin recruitment and abundance in the North Pacific

- The Southwest Pacific striped marlin stock is likely overfished and close to experiencing overfishing. Like their counterparts in the North Pacific, the Southwest Pacific stock has no limit reference point and the stock remains overfished despite fishing mortality at or below MSY levels. Catch must be further reduced to allow the stock to rebuild. Improvements must also be made to assessment inputs to ensure accurate reporting of catch and correct life history parameters. A recent scientific publication suggests more movement between management regions than previously reported in striped marlin and this has been confirmed by genetic and tagging studies. Due to this new information, the rate of mixing between stock should be examined further
- Expand data collection for sailfish and black marlin in the absence of a stock assessment with the goal of assessment capability in the near future
- Require the reporting of dead discards of all billfish species in fisheries under the WCPFC purview
- Promote and require the use of circle hooks in longline fisheries. These have been proven to reduce fishing mortality and increase live releases of billfish and other species not retained
- Where possible, implement trade prohibition of billfish products in international trade. Similar legislation has been passed, at the request of IGFA, in the United States that now bans importation of marlin, sailfish, and spearfish in the continental United States

### **Pacific Bluefin Tuna**

The 2020 benchmark assessment indicates that Pacific bluefin tuna SSB has slightly increased from the 2018 level; however, the stock remains overfished and fishing mortality, although it has declined, has not decreased to the level corresponding to  $F_{20\%SPR}$ . The IGFA recommends the Commission:

- Continue the evaluation and monitoring of the rebuilding plan while taking a precautionary approach to catch level adjustments until the stock is more rebuilt
- Ensure catch overages do not occur by urging nations to implement domestic catch limitation measures

### **Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) in tropical tuna fisheries**

There are concerns over the prevalence and management difficulty of FAD associated fisheries that are known to catch juvenile yellowfin and bigeye tunas. The IGFA recommends the Commission and FAD Working Group:

- Continue to closely monitor juvenile tuna fishing mortality associated with FAD fisheries
- Continue to manage the number of active and discarded FADs
- Evaluate a program to implement the suite of data collected by electronic equipped FAD devices
- Reduce the ecological impact of abandoned FADs

### **IUU Fishing**

- Increase efforts to reduce IUU fishing by improving VMS requirements across all managed species.
- Ban transshipment at sea until the Commission can verify that it is not facilitating IUU fishing.
- Strengthen the IUU vessel list by allowing vessels to be added at an intersessional basis

The IGFA welcomes the opportunity to collaborate and provide assistance toward achieving the goals of the Commission as well as implementing the recommendations provided in this document.

*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.*

Email: [HQ@igfa.org](mailto:HQ@igfa.org) • Website: [www.igfa.org](http://www.igfa.org)