



# Species Survival Network

CITES COP15 2010 • Doha, Qatar



## Atlantic Bluefin Tuna *Thunnus thynnus*

**CoP15 Prop. 19** (Monaco) Inclusion in Appendix I in accordance with RC 9.24 (Rev. CoP14), Annex 1, Criteria A) iii) and v) and Criteria C) i) and ii).

**SSN VIEW: SUPPORT Adoption of Proposal**

### ATLANTIC BLUEFIN TUNA POPULATIONS HAVE DECLINED DRAMATICALLY.

At a special meeting held in October 2009, the Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS) of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) determined that there is virtual certainty (96% probability) that the 2009 Spawning Stock Biomass (SSB) of the eastern stock of Atlantic bluefin tuna has fallen to less than 15% of its long term potential (equivalent to "historical abundance"). The SCRS also found that there is greater than 90% probability that the SSB of the western stock of the species is less than 15% of long term potential (ICCAT Doc. No. PA2-604 / 2009). These levels represent declines well within the suggested guidelines of 5-20% of baseline for a marked recent rate of decline for a commercially exploited aquatic species (CITES Resolution Conf. 9.24 (Rev. CoP14)).

Prior to the October ICCAT meeting, the extent of decline of Atlantic bluefin tuna populations in the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean between 1957 and 2007 had been estimated as at least 74.2%. The bulk of this decline (60.9%) occurred in only the last 10 years. The SCRS estimates that the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean stock is near collapse. In the western Atlantic, the extent of decline between 1970 and 2007 has been estimated at 82.4%. IUCN (2009) classifies the western Atlantic stock as Critically Endangered and the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean stock as Endangered.

### ATLANTIC BLUEFIN TUNA MEETS THE CRITERIA FOR AN APPENDIX I LISTING.

Atlantic bluefin tuna is slow-growing, long-lived, and late to mature, reaching sexual maturity at about 4-6 years of age in the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean and at 8-12 years in the western Atlantic. Individual spawning may occur only every two or three years. These biological characteristics make the species particularly vulnerable to overexploitation. As the Atlantic bluefin tuna has suffered a marked decline in the size of its wild population, it meets the biological criteria for listing in Appendix I of CITES (Annex 1, C (i) of Resolution Conf. 9.24 (Rev. CoP14)). Many species currently listed in CITES Appendix I have experienced declines far smaller than those of Atlantic bluefin tuna. The amount of data establishing these declines, going back to the 1950s, far exceeds that for virtually any other CITES-listed species.

**THE MAIN CAUSE OF DECLINE IS OVER-EXPLOITATION FOR INTERNATIONAL TRADE.**

Atlantic bluefin tuna is the highest-valued Atlantic tuna species in the global marketplace, with some single specimens selling for thousands of dollars. Traditionally consumed in Mediterranean countries, it is now the most popular species in the sashimi and sushi markets in Japan. The bulk of the catch is exported to Japan as frozen products, although some is consumed in Europe and North America.

The species is being severely overfished. According to the most recent assessment by the SCRS, spawning biomass of the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean stock has fallen well below levels needed even to sustain Maximum Sustainable Yield. In recent years, the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for this stock set by ICCAT has exceeded the recommendations of its own scientists, and the volume caught, factoring in both overfishing by individual countries and illegal fishing, significantly exceeds even this figure. As an example, in 2007, although the SCRS recommended a TAC of no more than 15,000 metric tons (t) for the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean stock, ICCAT adopted a quota that was almost twice as much (29,500 t). The actual catch for that year has been estimated to have been up to four times as much (61,000 t). The 32,356 t of processed bluefin tuna reported to ICCAT as imports by Japan alone exceeded the entire 2007 TAC by almost 3,000 t, even though the Japanese figure did not include fish used in domestic consumption in Mediterranean countries, intra-European trade, and catches by the national Japanese fishing fleet operating in the eastern Atlantic and the Mediterranean Sea. The under-reporting of overall catches, combined with other factors, means that stocks cannot be monitored with confidence and, therefore, that severe depletion may go undetected.

At its 2009 meeting, held after the CITES Appendix I listing proposal for the species had already been tabled, ICCAT agreed on a quota of 13,500 t for the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean stock. Although slightly lower than the levels recommended (but not adopted) in 2007 and 2008 and 8,500 t lower than the actual 2008 quota, this figure still provides a less than 50% chance of the species recovering even to Maximum Sustainable Yield levels -- and that is assuming perfect implementation, without any illegal fishing or take above quota, conditions that history suggests are unlikely to be fulfilled. Even the lowered quotas and compliance measures adopted in 2009 could be changed at the November 2010 ICCAT meeting, well after CITES CoP15. The only way to ensure recovery of this severely overstressed species is to suspend international commercial trade through a CITES Appendix I listing.

**ICCAT HAS FAILED TO PROPERLY MANAGE THE SPECIES.**

In 2009, an ICCAT Independent Review Panel critiqued ICCAT’s management of its bluefin tuna stocks:

“The Panel recommends that all fishing for East Atlantic and Mediterranean bluefin tuna be immediately suspended until the CPCs [Contracting Party, Cooperating non-Contracting Party, Entity or Fishing Entity] involved in those fisheries, their nationals and companies operating in their waters, agree to fully abide by the rules and recommendations of ICCAT and international fisheries law. The Panel considers that this decision is the only way to stop the continuation of what is seen by observers and by other CPCs as a travesty in fisheries management.”

“The Panel further recommends that the suspension only be lifted when ICCAT CPCs adopt measures consistent with ICCAT decisions and individual CPCs can demonstrate that they can control and report on their catch. Alternatively that ICCAT implements a full Secretariat based auditing and inspection regime for bluefin tuna fishing in the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean.”

The following table details ICCAT members’ failure to adopt quotas recommended by SCRS scientists, to abide by the quotas adopted, and to report catches accurately.

**Total Allowable Catches and Actual Catches in the East Atlantic and Mediterranean Sea (in metric tons)\***

Year	SCRS Recommended TAC	Adopted TAC	Reported Catch	Estimated Catch	Comments
2004	Not estimated but “catch levels of 26,000 t or more are not sustainable over the long-term.”	32,000	31,377	44,948	Fishing mortality “may have been more than three times the level which would permit the stock to stabilize at the Maximum Sustainable Yield level.”
2005	Same as 2004	32,000	35,732	45,547	SCRS reported that “current catch levels cannot be sustained in the long-term.”
2006	Not estimated	32,000	30,647	50,000	

Year	SCRS Recommended TAC	Adopted TAC	Reported Catch	Estimated Catch	Comments
2007	15,000	29,500	32,398	61,000	Estimated catch was four times more than the recommended TAC.  SCRS reported that unless the current regulatory structure "is adjusted . . . , it will lead to further reduction in spawning stock biomass with high risk of fisheries and stock collapse."
2008	15,000 or less	28,500	no data	no data	SCRS reported that "[a] collapse [of the fishery] in the near future is a possibility..." and that "...substantial overfishing is occurring and spawning biomass is well below levels needed to sustain MSY."
2009	Same as 2008	22,000	no data	no data	
2010	Same as 2008	13,500	no data	no data	

\*References for information in this table are available upon request.

ICCAT has repeatedly failed to implement the effective management measures, based on scientific advice, needed to prevent overexploitation of this species. For example, at the last ICCAT meeting in November 2009, the purse seine fishery that catches tuna to supply tuna "farms" (see below) was reduced only from two months to one month of fishing, disregarding the SCRS recommendation for the fishery to be closed during the entire spawning period. The failure of ICCAT's management measures have contributed to the species' steep decline.

Given the dire state of the Atlantic bluefin tuna fishery and the alarming rates of stock decline, even the lowered quota and minimal compliance measures adopted in 2009 are totally inadequate. ICCAT should have implemented a complete ban on bluefin tuna catches until scientists are able to demonstrate that the populations had significantly recovered.

#### **WILD STOCKS ARE THREATENED BY TUNA "FARMING".**

Catches of bluefin tuna in the Mediterranean have increased substantially with the introduction tuna farming. Live tuna are captured, placed in floating sea pens and then transported to fattening facilities. Because these farms target large tuna and transport the fish away from the harvest areas, the SCRS has reported that "it is crucial to get precise information about the total catch, the size composition, the area and flag of capture, time in captivity as well as growth and death in farms." Moreover, "[h]olding tuna in fattening farms introduces additional uncertainties to estimates of total catch, catch-at-age and catch by area. These quantities are essential to properly conduct stock assessments."

#### **WITHOUT SWIFT AND STRONG ACTION, ATLANTIC BLUEFIN TUNA FACES COMMERCIAL EXTINCTION.**

A CITES Appendix I listing may be the Atlantic bluefin tuna's last and best hope for survival. Every previous attempt to conserve this species while allowing continued trade has failed. The reduced catch allowances taken by ICCAT in 2009 may well be reversed as early as 2010 if the proposal to CITES is withdrawn or rejected.

If Fisheries Management Organizations such as ICCAT fail to properly manage the stocks they oversee, global action must be taken. CITES and its Parties have both the authority and the enforcement capacity to take such action. Unlike an ICCAT measure, which applies only to 48 countries, an Appendix I listing under CITES applies to 175 countries. It will carry strong implementation and enforcement powers, including a significantly greater ability to curb illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing of this species throughout its range.

**Atlantic bluefin tuna stocks have declined to below 15% of the historical baseline and clearly meet the criteria for listing in Appendix I of CITES. ICCAT members have consistently failed to act in the best interest of conservation of the Atlantic bluefin tuna and have massively exceeded catch quotas. Even in the unlikely event that ICCAT quotas will be adhered to in the future, there is no assurance that the current quota is low enough to allow populations to recover. A CITES Appendix I listing is required in order for the species to have a chance to recover, and for the lasting socio-economic impacts from stock depletion to be avoided.**

-Revised 5 January 2009

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