



SFP Recommends Backup Plan for Mediterranean tuna Should CITES 1 Listing Fail

There is no doubt that responsible end customers - restaurants and retailers - should stop buying East Atlantic/Mediterranean bluefin tuna, on the basis it is depleted and the scientific advice supports a moratorium, yet the management authority (ICCAT) is failing to act responsibly. It is also clear, however, that many end customers will continue to buy sashimi grade tuna. Under those circumstances, any trader or processor stopping sourcing simply transfers the business to one of their competitors. Responsible traders trying to prevent overfishing therefore should first seek to press regulators for a moratorium. And this is what some Japanese tuna buyers appear to have done (i.e., Mitsubishi Corporation Position Statement, 16th September 2009), by supporting the government of Japan's proposal to ICCAT for a one year moratorium in November 2009. The position was supported by the US and others, but blocked by the EU. Responsible management of this depleted stock may be unachievable at this time.

Responsible traders should now encourage their governments to vote to put bluefin on CITES 1, and, if successful, to work to prevent their governments from taking a "reservation" and exempting themselves from CITES 1 requirements.

However, if the CITES meeting in Doha this month fails to list bluefin tuna under Appendix 1, then - barring extraordinary action from ICCAT - fishing will go ahead in May. At that point, traders - and the East Atlantic/Mediterranean bluefin - need a backup plan to minimize further damage and continue efforts to improve ICCAT's performance.

Any back-up plan must be developed now, if it is to be effectively deployed in time for the start of fishing. Even if CITES 1 succeeds for Mediterranean bluefin, the steps taken in the back-up plan can be readily used for other tuna and tuna-like species also under pressure, whether managed by ICCAT or another Regional Fisheries Management Organization. And it should be understood that a successful listing of East Atlantic/Mediterranean bluefin will, by constraining supply, increase the demand for other tuna already in trouble, such as bigeye.

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SFP recommends the following:

1. Managers should follow scientific advice, which should be required to advise TACs with a 90 percent certainty of rebuilding stocks to above target healthy levels within 10 years. This is arguably international best practices for rebuilding fisheries. Given the current status of the stock, we believe this should translate into a 1 to 3 year no-fishing moratorium.

2. All traders should adopt a "control document" and use "intra-industry warranties" to support existing efforts (and possible CITES measures) to eliminate illegal fishing.

The basics, in order to prevent collapse of a fish stock, are: (1) scientific advice be precautionary; (2) fishery managers follow advice; (3) fishers comply with management decisions. SFP has found the major whitefish fisheries worldwide who follow such advice are not overfished. In the case of East Atlantic/Mediterranean bluefin tuna, fishery managers have proven unable to reduce the TAC to precautionary levels, but the depleted condition of the stock and the looming CITES listing are forcing concessions toward a lower catch.

Bluefin traders need to:

Engage their suppliers, and ultimately the tuna farms and catchers, and make future business conditional on farm and catcher support for ICCAT conservation measures, specifically:

- Require ICCAT decision-makers to follow their scientists' advice;
- Require ICCAT scientists to prepare advice based on 90% likelihood of recovery in 10 years.

The next stock assessment is due in six months. It is critical that it provides a realistic and transparent assessment of the likelihood of different harvest scenarios successfully rebuilding bluefin tuna stocks.

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The lower quota set by ICCAT in late 2009 in Recife means less quota for individual fishing vessels, increasing their temptation to fish illegally. While ICCAT has introduced new measures to reduce IUU, their effectiveness remains unconfirmed. The risk of IUU poses two critical threats to bluefin buyers. First, they risk "handling stolen goods". Second, the future of the stock is further undermined. Based on improvements achieved in other fisheries facing similar challenges, we are recommending the following "warranty" program specifically to bluefin tuna traders worldwide:

- Adopt stronger legal verification measures, via supplier "control documents", and ideally persuade the importing countries to require these measures for all imports. Current compliance with the existing bluefin catch documentation (BCD) program is only 43%, according to results presented at the latest ICCAT meeting in Madrid.

For more information and SFP recommendations for solving the overfishing conundrum of East Atlantic/Mediterranean bluefin tuna please visit our website at www.sustainablefish.org.

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