

Opportunities for fraud are not limited to the ranching industry. Without real-time reporting and verification of catch information, any vessels that exceed their annual quotas can more easily sell their fish to other boats, hiding the illegal origin of the catch. Undeclared catches can also be landed locally or transferred to transshipment vessels or other means of transportation that then deliver the undocumented fish to foreign ports.

Regardless of where or how it is caught, a bluefin tuna can change hands many times before it reaches the market. Each time it is imported, exported, or re-exported, there is an opportunity for illegal catch to be mixed in with legal catch, weights and numbers to be misreported, and origin information to be changed. **To close these loopholes, ICCAT must improve the existing bluefin catch documentation system by adding an electronic reporting requirement, reducing the chance for fraud, inaccurate reporting, and delays in validation.**

## The BCD System

ICCAT mandated the use of a BCD system in 2007 after widespread reports of large quota overages and continued IUU fishing. The system was designed to assign a unique ID number and track each catch of fish as it moved through the supply chain, allowing customs officials, enforcement officers and buyers to verify the tuna's origin and legality. Information from

The Italian coast guard recently revealed a widespread, well-established trafficking operation of falsifying and avoiding bluefin catch documents.

the BCD was also to be used by scientists as they determined the status of the populations.

**Unfortunately, the paper-based BCD has**

**failed to fully address the problems of IUU fishing.** Printed documents can easily be altered or forged, allowing illegally caught fish to enter the market. In July, the Italian coast guard revealed a widespread, well-established trafficking operation of falsifying and avoiding bluefin catch documents. Paper-based documents also slow data collection and reporting, inhibiting

effective management of the species. As of November 2010, crucial information was still missing from ICCAT's BCD database for 75 percent of the purse-seine catches from 2008 and 2009.<sup>2</sup>

## The Solution

ICCAT has started to address the inherent problems in the BCD system. In 2010, recognizing the need for an electronic system, the commission formed a working group to design, develop, and implement an eBCD in time for the 2012 bluefin tuna fishing season.<sup>3</sup> ICCAT members must continue to support these efforts and secure funding for a comprehensive electronic documentation system that reduces fraud, increases compliance, and allows for more accurate and timely reporting of catch data.

The Pew Environment Group calls on ICCAT to adopt a system that includes, at a minimum:

- A central, secure database storing the data generated by the eBCD that can be accessed easily by authorized users.
- A bar-coding system that allows operators to generate a physical label, linked to the eBCD system, which would allow individual fish to be tagged and easily tracked through the supply chain.
- A requirement that all information contained in the eBCD be checked and validated by the appropriate authority before the fish could move through the supply chain.

### Endnotes

- 1 ICCAT. 2009. *Recommendation by ICCAT Amending Recommendation 08-12 on an ICCAT Bluefin Tuna Catch Documentation Program* [Rec. 09-11]. [www.iccat.int/Documents/Recs/compendiopdf-e/2009-11-e.pdf](http://www.iccat.int/Documents/Recs/compendiopdf-e/2009-11-e.pdf).
- 2 International Consortium of Investigative Journalists. 2010. *Looting the Seas: How Overfishing, Fraud, and Negligence Plundered the Majestic Bluefin Tuna*. [www.iwatchnews.org/environment/natural-resources/looting-seas](http://www.iwatchnews.org/environment/natural-resources/looting-seas).
- 3 ICCAT. 2010. *Recommendation by ICCAT on an Electronic Bluefin Tuna Catch Documentation Program (eBCD)* [Rec. 10-11]. [www.iccat.int/Documents/Recs/compendiopdf-e/2010-11-e.pdf](http://www.iccat.int/Documents/Recs/compendiopdf-e/2010-11-e.pdf).



# AN ELECTRONIC BLUEFIN CATCH DOCUMENT SYSTEM

Increased Compliance and Improved Data

According to recent stock assessments, Atlantic bluefin tuna populations are at near-historic lows, and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing is hindering the recovery of this highly valuable species.

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Recognizing the threat that illegal fishing poses to the conservation and management of bluefin tuna, the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) mandated in 2007 that all its members implement a paper-based catch documentation system.<sup>1</sup> The bluefin catch document (BCD) tracks fish as they are caught, transported, farmed, and traded on the world market. Although the paper BCD was a necessary first step in addressing the impacts of IUU fishing, the system needs to be strengthened in order to better detect fraud and deter illegal fishing and trade.

## The Tuna Supply Chain

The Atlantic bluefin tuna supply chain is long and complicated, and the many steps along the way provide the opportunity for fraud and misreporting (see diagram, next page). In the Mediterranean Sea, the majority of bluefin tuna are caught by purse-seiners that target large aggregations of adult fish. The catch is then towed to floating ranching pens, where the fish are kept for up to two years while they are fattened to increase their market value. Using the technology in place today, it is



*Tuna ranching off the coast of Italy, from inside the cage.*

PHOTO: MARCO CARE// MARINE PHOTOBANK

very difficult to verify the exact number and the weight of fish transferred to these pens, making them an ideal place to launder bluefin caught in excess of the agreed quota. This year, for the first time, ICCAT required pen operators to monitor and submit underwater video of all of these transfers. Countries are also required to begin testing stereoscopic video systems, which use two cameras to produce a more precise estimate of the number and weight of transferred bluefin. ICCAT should review countries' success in using these stereoscopic systems and, if they are shown to be helpful, require that they be officially adopted by all ranches and purse-seining operations. Underwater video is, however, just one additional measure that can assist with monitoring. Other tools can help close the loopholes in this fishery.

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# Mediterranean Bluefin Tuna Supply Chain

## Illegal Driftnets

### Description

Driftnets are one example of how bluefin tuna are illegally caught. ICCAT banned the use of driftnets to catch bluefin tuna and swordfish in 2003.

### Problem

The Italian fleet continues to use driftnets to catch bluefin tuna and swordfish.

### Solution

Increase enforcement to stop the use of illegal driftnets; implement an electronic catch documentation system to better track the fish.



PHOTO: JUAN CUETOS/OCEANA

## Black Market

### Description

Illegally caught fish or unreported fish lack proper documentation, or documents are forged.

### Problem

These fish cannot be accurately tracked or counted, skewing the results of scientific assessments of how much fish can be sustainably caught during the next fishing season.

### Solution

Increase enforcement at ports; implement an electronic catch documentation system that would make it easier to identify illegally caught fish and to assure retailers and consumers that their fish are legal.



PHOTO: DOMINIQUE SOUSE/PHOTOLIBRARY.COM



PHOTO: NORBERT WU/MINDEN PICTURES/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC STOCK

## Longlines and Traps

### Description

Longline fishermen use strings of baited hooks that can stretch miles behind their boats; trap fishermen form a maze of nets that capture and corral bluefin tuna during their spawning season.

### Problem

Although many fishermen operate legally in the Mediterranean, the number and weight of fish caught are sometimes misreported on bluefin catch documents; in other cases, they are not reported at all.

### Solution

An electronic catch documentation system should include physical bar codes, generated for each fish, to ensure that the legal catch is reported properly and to help reduce fraud in this fishery.

## Purse Seine

### Description

Industrial purse-seine vessels encircle large schools of bluefin tuna with nets, capturing many fish at once.

### Problem

Although some vessels operate legally and report their catch accurately, the number and weight of fish caught are often misreported or not documented at all.

### Solution

An electronic catch documentation system would allow officials to access and verify information more quickly; if misinformation or fraud was suspected, officials could inspect the operation.



PHOTO: ALBERTO INGLESIA/OCEANA

## Transfer/Ranching

### Description

Young bluefin tuna are towed to floating pens, where they are fattened before being killed.

More than 60 bluefin tuna ranches exist in the Mediterranean.

### Problem

Transfer between nets happens underwater, where it is difficult to get an accurate count of the total number of fish.

### Solution

Stereoscopic video camera systems use dual cameras and computer algorithms to calculate the number and size of fish transferred.

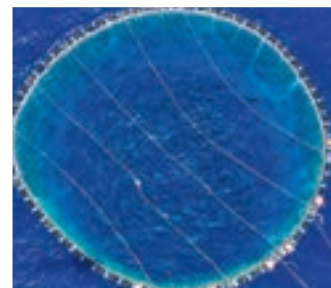


PHOTO: PAUL HILTON/GREENPEACE

## Killing

### Description

Bluefin tuna are fattened in the ranches, where they are held from a few months to two years before being killed, processed, and sold on the world market.

### Problem

Because the tuna increase in weight while in the pens, ranching provides the opportunity to hide unreported catch or to mix legally and illegally caught fish.

### Solution

An electronic catch documentation system would help improve the accuracy of what the ranches report; a stereoscopic video system would also address the problem of misreporting.



PHOTO: TONY GENTILE/REUTERS



PHOTO: MAKOTO HIROSE/SEAPICS.COM

## Global Trade

### Description

After a bluefin tuna is caught, it can change hands many times as it is bought, sold, and transported around the world.

### Problem

Ample opportunity for fraud and misreporting; documents are easily forged, or inaccurate information is entered.

### Solution

An electronic catch documentation system would help ensure that all legal catch could be easily and quickly tracked and counted and that illegal catch could be more easily identified.

