



# 5 Reasons to Stop the Wasteful Fishing of Atlantic Bluefin Tuna

Atlantic bluefin tuna are severely depleted and surface longline fishing shares a large part of the blame. Surface longlines are a type of fishing gear that stretches miles of line with baited hooks intended to catch commercially-valuable species such as yellowfin tuna and swordfish. Unfortunately, hundreds of tons of Atlantic bluefin tuna are lost to surface longlines annually in the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico—the only known spawning ground for the western Atlantic population of this species.

## Here are five reasons to take action to stop the wasteful catch of these magnificent fish.

1. **The Atlantic bluefin tuna population is in danger.** According to the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas, the organization responsible for managing bluefin, the population of western Atlantic bluefin tuna has declined by 64 percent since 1970. The International Union for Conservation of Nature classifies the species as Endangered.
2. **Surface longlines are wasteful and indiscriminate.** This gear catches more than 80 species of non-target ocean wildlife, including sharks, sea turtles, blue marlin, marine mammals, and seabirds. Much of this unwanted catch is discarded, dead or dying.
3. **Two highly-selective alternatives to surface longlines exist to catch yellowfin tuna and swordfish with minimal unwanted catch.** First, greenstick gear uses a 35- to 45-foot pole to tow five to 10 baited drop lines across the surface to catch yellowfin tuna. Second, swordfish buoy gear uses small groups of buoys set in a row at the surface to suspend baited hooks 150 to 600 feet deep to catch this fish. Restoration funds from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill can provide fishermen in the Gulf with the resources they need to switch to less-wasteful fishing practices.
4. **Atlantic bluefin tuna are incredible fish.** They grow to 10 feet long, weigh up to 1,500 pounds, and live as many as 40 years.
5. **Fishermen need protection, too.** The surface longline fishery has consistently exceeded its annual bluefin catch limit in recent years. In 2012, for example, it went over the adjusted quota by 218%.

**Take Action Today to Help Atlantic Bluefin Tuna.** This summer, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Fisheries Service, or NOAA Fisheries, will seek public comments on a new rule that could help stop the waste of bluefin caused by surface longlines and benefit those who fish responsibly. Turn over this fact sheet to find five ways you can help encourage NOAA to issue a strong bluefin rule.

<sup>i</sup> International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas. (2012). Report of the 2012 Atlantic bluefin tuna stock assessment session. Doc. No. SCI-033/2012. [iccat.int/Documents/Meetings/Docs/2012\\_BFT\\_ASSESS.pdf](http://iccat.int/Documents/Meetings/Docs/2012_BFT_ASSESS.pdf).

<sup>ii</sup> Collette, BB, KE Carpenter, BA Polidoro, MJ Juan-Jordá, A Boustany, DJ Die, C Elfes, W Fox, J Graves, LR Harrison, R McManus, CV Minte-Vera, R Nelson, V Restrepo, J Schratwieser, C-L Sun, A Amorim, M Brick Peres, C Canales, G Cardenas, S-K Chang, W-C Chiang, N de Oliveira Leite, Jr., H Harwell, R Lessa, FL Fredou, HA Oxenford, R Serra, K-T Shao, R Sumaila, S-P Wang, R Watson, and E Yáñez. 2011. High value and long life—double jeopardy for tunas and billfishes. *Science* 333: 291-292.



Photo Credit: Oceana/Keith Ellenbogen

## 5 Ways You Can Help Atlantic Bluefin Tuna

You can have a big impact on the conservation of Atlantic bluefin tuna and the lives of the fishermen who depend on them. Follow these five steps to encourage NOAA Fisheries to prohibit destructive surface longlines in the Gulf of Mexico to protect spawning bluefin and to implement strict limits on the amount of bluefin killed in the surface longline fishery. These measures would reduce the unintended killing of bluefin and other species on wasteful fishing gear, encourage the transition to more selective fishing methods, and benefit traditional bluefin fishermen who rely on healthy populations for their livelihood.

### Follow the five steps below to encourage NOAA to issue a strong bluefin rule.

- 1. Speak up for bluefin; submit a comment.** Send a message (<http://bit.ly/N9znCW>) to NOAA encouraging the agency to develop a strong rule that ends the waste of severely depleted bluefin. Ask friends and colleagues to give you a written comment urging the agency to protect these tuna. Or host a letter-writing party by getting friends and family together and handing out talking points so people can draft letters to NOAA. Submit these comments on their behalf at a public hearing.
- 2. Attend a hearing.** NOAA is scheduling public hearings this summer—our chance to ask the agency in person to protect western Atlantic bluefin in their only known spawning ground and to implement a strict limit on unwanted bluefin mortality in the surface longline fishery. Make sure you plan to speak so your comments become part of the public record.
- 3. Recruit your friends.** Do you have friends and family who fish? Or who just care about our ocean environment? Bring them to a hearing in your area—and ask them to speak up for bluefin, too.
- 4. Write a letter to the editor.** Letters to the editor are typically no more than 150 words. They are a great way to make your voice heard and to encourage others in your region to do the same. If you don't know where to start, contact the bluefin advocate listed below and he can provide you with guidance on how to get your letter published.
- 5. Stay informed.** Email Cameron Jaggard at [cjaggard@pewtrusts.org](mailto:cjaggard@pewtrusts.org) to receive updates on the hearing schedule and more tips on how you can help protect bluefin tuna. Your voice can make all the difference.

**For further information, please visit:**

[pewenvironment.org/gulftuna](http://pewenvironment.org/gulftuna)