



# Following the Science Is Critical for Atlantic Fish Stocks

Backsliding by ICCAT on science-based management threatens valuable fisheries, including prized bluefin tuna

## Overview

The International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) is a regional fisheries management organization that plays an important role in safeguarding the health of iconic Atlantic fish populations and the profitability of the fisheries that depend on them.

To ensure that these populations return to or stay at healthy levels, ICCAT decision-makers must follow the advice of the scientists on how to best manage these fisheries.

\$ 4.5 billion

The combined end value of the 5 major Atlantic tunas in 2014.<sup>1</sup>



Since its inception in 1966, however, ICCAT has had a history of questionable management of the species under its purview, including frequent failure to follow the scientists' advice for when and how these stocks should be managed and where fishing quotas should be set.

Faced with mounting global pressure, ICCAT managers started to improve their practices in the mid-2000s, and several stocks, including eastern Atlantic bluefin tuna, began to rebound. In recent years, however, there have been worrying signs that ICCAT has started to backslide when economics or politics make it easy to do so.

**Decisions by ICCAT can make or break the health of valuable Atlantic fisheries. The Commission must recommit itself to science-based management—today and in the future.**

## The History of ICCAT Decision-Making

Trends show that following the science works

ICCAT oversees management of about 30 fish stocks, including Atlantic bluefin, skipjack, yellowfin, albacore, and bigeye tunas, as well as swordfish, other billfishes, and some sharks.



■ 51 ICCAT contracting parties    ▨ ICCAT management area



From 1970 to 2008, ICCAT followed the science **60 percent** of the time.



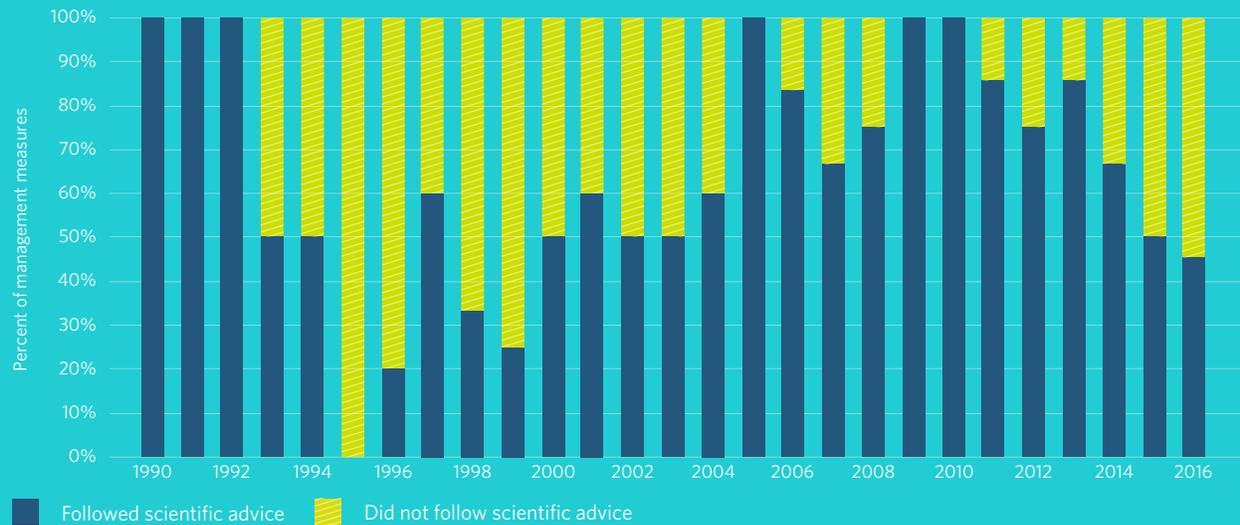
From 2009 to 2014, ICCAT followed the science **88 percent** of the time.



But in 2015 and 2016, managers have followed the expert advice only **43 percent** of the time.

From 1990 through 2008, ICCAT adopted almost as many management measures that did not follow scientific advice as the number that did. This occurred despite the Commission's responsibility and mandate to ensure that stocks are well-managed.

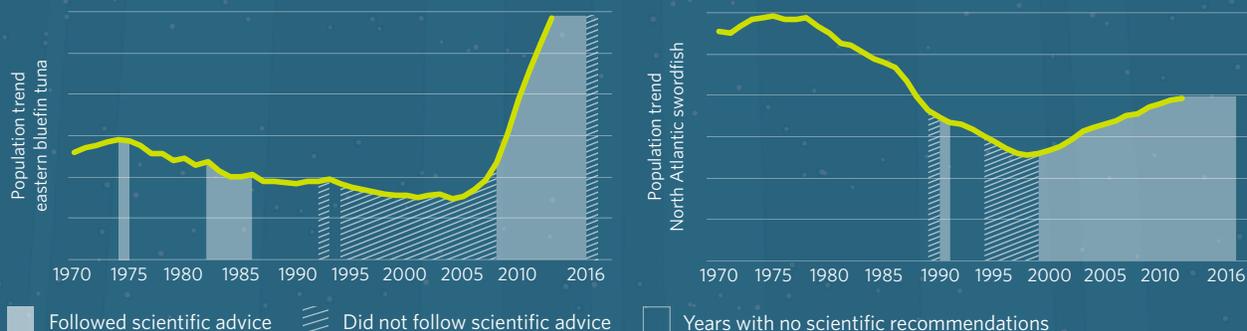
In fact, throughout ICCAT's history, there were many times that the Commission refused to adopt any measures, although scientists had advised that certain actions were needed.



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Times since 1970 (or **36 percent** of the time) that ICCAT took no action despite specific advice from scientists to do so.

In 2008, an independent review of ICCAT found that the Commission had ignored years of advice in its management of eastern bluefin tuna—which the reviewers called an “international disgrace.”\* After the threat of an international trade ban, ICCAT began to alter its approach in 2009 and follow scientific advice on bluefin and other stocks. **When managed according to the scientific advice, the population began to rebound.**



Source: ICCAT

Other stocks followed suit—highlighting the correlation between following the science and stock recovery. **Despite these successes, signs in the last two years indicate that ICCAT is moving in the wrong direction.**

\*Glenn D. Hurry, Moritaka Hayashi, and Jean-Jacques Maguire, “Report of the Independent Review, International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT)” (2008), <http://www.iccat.int/Documents/Meetings/Docs/Comm/PLE-106-ENG.pdf>

**14 yrs** Time elapsed between scientists’ recommendation to set a quota for Mediterranean swordfish and ICCAT’s adoption of one in 2016—a quota still above the level recommended by scientists.

ICCAT’s 51 contracting parties rely on the Commission to manage these Atlantic species effectively. When ICCAT commits to science, fisheries see results.

**Endnote:** 1. Grantly Galland, Anthony Rogers, and Amanda Nickson, “Netting Billions: A Global Valuation of Tuna” (2016), [www.pewtrusts.org/tunavalue](http://www.pewtrusts.org/tunavalue).

**For further information, please visit:**

[pewtrusts.org/tuna](http://pewtrusts.org/tuna)

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