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CITES 2010 ATLANTIC BLUEFIN TUNA

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POSITION ON A CITES APPENDIX I LISTING

The Pew Environment Group strongly supports the proposal by the Principality of Monaco to include the Atlantic bluefin tuna (*Thunnus thynnus*) in CITES Appendix I. The science is clear. A majority of the members of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation's Ad Hoc Panel have determined that eastern and western populations of the species meet the CITES biological criteria for inclusion in Appendix I. CITES Resolution Conf. 9.24 (Rev. CoP14) clearly states that data used to estimate or infer a baseline for extent of decline of a commercially exploited aquatic species should extend as far into the past as possible. The available data on Atlantic bluefin tuna clearly show that the western and eastern stocks meet the Appendix I criteria for marked decline.



Alexandre Dulaunoy/Flickr

Scientists from the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) predicted that if the current level of fishing mortality continued, the Eastern Atlantic spawning stock would fall to 18 percent of the 1970 level and **6 percent of the historical level**. This trend is corroborated by the dramatic decline in the mean size of fish caught, and some experts predict that even under a complete fishing ban there are significant chances that the stock will continue to decline. This falls well within the CITES definition of marked decline.

It should be stressed that the productivity of Western Atlantic bluefin is closely linked to the Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean stock. New scientific information, which is expected to appear in the peer-reviewed literature before the CITES Conference of the Parties (CoP15) in March 2010, highlights more genetic mixing than was previously hypothesized. Therefore, management actions taken in the Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean are likely to influence the recovery in the Western Atlantic. A higher degree of mixing than had been assumed also puts the western stock at even greater risk and makes it even more eligible for CITES Appendix I, because increasing overfishing in the Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean, and increasing illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing in both the Mediterranean and Eastern Atlantic will have greater negative impacts on recruitment in the Western Atlantic.

Bluefin tuna are remarkable animals, able to dive more than 900 meters and migrate thousands of kilometers each year across the ocean. But they are in trouble. Fueled by the lucrative sushi and sashimi markets around the world, the incredible value of this species creates an extraordinary incentive to ignore quotas, fish illegally and pressure regulators to disregard scientific recommendations. The best science shows that populations of Atlantic bluefin tuna are on the brink of collapse. Time is short, and the time for listing Atlantic bluefin tuna on Appendix I is now.



Stewart Butterfield/Flickr

ICCAT is the regional fisheries management body responsible for Atlantic bluefin tuna. ICCAT has struggled for decades to sustainably manage Atlantic bluefin tuna, but to date it has proved to be a dismal failure in halting the continuing decline toward commercial extinction of this iconic species. When the Atlantic bluefin tuna was considered for a CITES listing in 1992 (at CoP8), ICCAT committed to lowering quota levels to rebuild the stock. Quotas were cut in the first two years after the 1992 CITES CoP in Japan, but the quota was subsequently raised dramatically. Clearly, ICCAT management measures have been ineffective at preventing the decline of the stock. An independent review that ICCAT commissioned stated,

ICCAT CPCs' performance in managing fisheries on bluefin tuna particularly in the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean Sea is widely regarded as an international disgrace and the international community which has entrusted the management of this iconic species to ICCAT deserve better performance from ICCAT than it has received to date.

In addition, the lack of adequate enforcement and rampant IUU fishing for bluefin tuna have pushed actual mortality rates to three to five times the limits recommended by ICCAT scientists and up to double

that agreed by ICCAT itself. International trade poses an increasing threat to the survival of this majestic species. Placing Atlantic bluefin tuna on Appendix I at CoP15 will give populations of this fish a chance to rebuild. The primary threat to this species is international trade—and that is the purview of CITES to address. While ICCAT is responsible for assigning quotas, only CITES can regulate international trade, and only CITES has the authority and ability to suspend international commercial trade until the species recovers.

The Principality of Monaco, interested in preserving the role of ICCAT in management of Atlantic bluefin tuna, has included a draft resolution to accompany its proposal that sets the parameters for transferring the species to Appendix II in the future, as well as an appropriate role for ICCAT while the Atlantic bluefin is included in Appendix I. This listing proposal is not meant to be punitive for ICCAT; rather, it is designed to provide assistance for the sustainable conservation and management of a critical species under its jurisdiction. An Appendix I listing for Atlantic bluefin would concurrently enable ICCAT to build a stronger record in terms of setting scientific quotas, enforcing those quotas and working with the global community to significantly reduce IUU fishing. The resolution would enable the CITES Parties to work with ICCAT and determine when the species had recovered sufficiently for it to be transferred to Appendix II, and would set in motion a process to do so.

RECOMMENDATION

We urge the Parties to support both the proposal itself and the accompanying resolution.

