PHOTO: BRIAN SKERRY/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC STOCK

NEED FOR AN ELECTRONIC BLUEFIN CATCH DOCUMENTATION SYSTEM

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. Compounding efforts to control IUU is the fact that the bluefin tuna supply chain is long and complicated, and the multiple steps provide the opportunity for fraud and misreporting. Regardless of where or how the fish 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 illegally caught tuna to be mixed with legal catch, weights and numbers to be misreported and origin information to be changed. Recognizing the threat that illegal fishing poses for bluefin tuna conservation and management, the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) mandated in 2007 that all its members implement a paper-based catch documentation system.[1] 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 initial step to address the impacts of IUU fishing, problems with the accuracy and timeliness of the data are hampering its usefulness. An electronic system would greatly improve the accuracy of catch and trade information.

ICCAT members have the opportunity to develop and implement an electronic catch documentation system for Atlantic bluefin tuna at the upcoming annual meeting in November. Countries must act now to better detect fraud, deter IUU fishing and trade of Atlantic bluefin tuna, and reduce inaccurate reporting and delays in validation.

THE SOLUTION

In 2010, ICCAT took the first step in addressing the inherent problems in its current BCD system by forming a Working Group to design, develop and implement an electronic Bluefin Catch Documentation system (eBCD) in time for the 2012 bluefin tuna fishing season.[2]

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 that is 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 can move through the supply chain.

1 International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas. 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.

2 International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas. 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.

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For additional resources, visit us at **www.PewEnvironment.org/Tuna**.

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