



EAST ATLANTIC AND MEDITERRANEAN BLUEFIN TUNA

Towards the full recovery of the stock

WWF commends ICCAT for steps taken towards sustainable management and associated compliance performance of East Atlantic and Mediterranean bluefin tuna.

WWF expects that Contracting Parties, Cooperating non-Contracting Parties, Entities or Fishing Entities (CPCs) will act according to the spirit of the Convention and resist the temptation to undermine the successful achievements of the last 10 years. WWF believes that the milestones towards the full recovery of the East Atlantic and Mediterranean bluefin tuna are:

- Maintain TAC at the level set by the recovery plan for 2017
- Robust stock assessment in 2017
- Ensure full traceability of catches
- Fair allocation of quotas at national level.

BACKGROUND

In the last decade of the 20th Century the millennia-old bluefin tuna fishery in the Mediterranean entered a phase of rapid and intense deterioration when the new practice of farming wild-caught tunas, formerly unknown in the Mediterranean, proliferated without control. This generated a perverse overfishing spiral as growing demand for live large tunas fuelled the massive development of industrial purse seine fleets and their expansion over virtually all Mediterranean waters where bluefin tuna gathered to reproduce.

Since 2001 WWF has led the international campaign to avoid the collapse of the bluefin tuna population and to ensure rational and sustainable fishing activity.

After years of mismanagement, in 2006 ICCAT reacted to the clear calls from science and civil society worldwide to avert the collapse of the fishery and the stock, adopting a first recovery plan for the species. This first plan fell short of following scientific advice. It has been strengthened and refined over the years – particularly since 2009, coinciding with a proposal to list the species in the App. I of the CITES Convention in 2010.

In 2014 the Commission issued Recommendation 14-04 (amending 13-07) to establish a multi-annual recovery plan for the following 3 years for bluefin tuna in the East Atlantic and Mediterranean. The Total Allowable Catch was established for more than one year, with an increase of about 20% TAC per year recommended by the SCRS to reach Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) as follows: 16,142t for 2015, 19,296t for 2016 and 23,155t for 2017. There is still concern about the potential for illegal fishing due to overcapacity of the fleet and loopholes plaguing traceability and control. In 2014 the East Atlantic and Mediterranean bluefin tuna stock assessment was also updated, and scientists concluded that the management efforts of the past few years have resulted in a substantial increase in bluefin tuna population size. There is even the possibility that a full recovery of the stock to above its MSY might be reached soon¹. However, scientists warn of the huge uncertainties surrounding the assessment exercise which have prevented an agreement being reached on robust advice to ICCAT regarding quotas and other aspects. The next stock assessment for East Atlantic and Mediterranean bluefin tuna will take place in 2017.

Major steps have been taken for the management of the stock. Now is the time to capitalize on these efforts and make sure that the full recovery of the stock is achieved by 2022.

In addition to efforts to recover stocks to levels above MSY, ongoing research into bluefin tuna ecology has increased knowledge of the species. SCRS reports on improved understanding of regional mixing levels, size data from catches destined for farms and length-weight relationships. These sources show the complexity of bluefin tuna behaviour. The ICCAT Atlantic-wide research programme for bluefin tuna (GBYP) appears to have expedited this work and WWF appreciates those research efforts. The GBYP tagging programme is providing significant insights into bluefin tuna mixing and migration patterns.

¹ Refer to report from 2014 ICCAT Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS)

On the occasion of the 20th Special Meeting of the ICCAT Commission, WWF calls upon all CPCs to:

1. Maintain the TAC at the level set by Rec. 14-04 (23,155t) for 2017

Although there are clear signs of recovery of the stock, a precautionary approach must be maintained and, pending results from SCRS assessments that would support any management option, TACs for 2017 must not be modified upwards from ICCAT Recommendation 14-04.

2. Ensure full traceability and eradication of IUU fishing

Lack of traceability from the boat to the market still prevails, preventing the eradication of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. Although the ICCAT Secretariat and CPCs have made an effort to put in place the e-BCD scheme, loopholes still remain at the farming level. For example, ICCAT members apply different measurement methods, which don't facilitate a strict reporting system. The use of stereoscopic cameras when bluefin tunas enter the fattening farms is a viable technology which could help to fight IUU fishing practices and will help the estimation of fish size, relevant data for the stock assessment. WWF asks ICCAT CPCs to adopt a standardized protocol for the use of stereoscopic cameras covering all bluefin tuna caging operations.

The video record should cover the entire transfer process and be provided to the observer immediately following the transfer while still on board.

3. Support ICCAT SCRS in its endeavour to develop a new methodology and gather new data leading to a much more reliable and robust stock assessment in 2017

In the upcoming session of the ICCAT SCRS, new models will be proposed and reviewed to improve the reliability of scientific advice. So far, most of the data used for the assessments comes from the fishery sector. It is crucial that a greater effort is made to ensure the availability of fisheries-independent data. This should result in a more accurate knowledge of the status of the species and thus better management. WWF is proud to contribute to the GBYP electronic tagging programme and is committed to continuing such efforts.

4. Allocate quota for traditional and small scale fisheries

WWF supports a fair allocation of fishing opportunities and strongly encourages ICCAT Contracting Parties to include traditional and small scale fleet segments when they distribute national quotas.

Fishing opportunities should be allocated using transparent and objective criteria, including those of an environmental, social and economic nature. They should also endeavour to fairly distribute national catch limits between the various fleet segments, including traditional and small-scale fisheries, and provide incentives to fishing vessels deploying selective fishing gear or using fishing techniques with reduced environmental impact. Bluefin tuna quotas allocated to small scale-fleets should be governed by the same high standards of monitoring, control and surveillance as all other allocations.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.