

Media briefing:

Saving the bluefin tuna: towards an international trade ban

December 2009

Fishing in the Mediterranean and parts of the North Atlantic has decimated northern bluefin tuna stocks to less than 15 per cent of their original population size. The near collapse of the tuna population and flawed decision-making in the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) have led governments, scientists and environmental organisations to demand immediate species conservation measures, including a suspension of international trade in bluefin tuna under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). Over the next few months, the EU will decide whether to support this ban at the next CITES meeting in March 2010.

“This is an all or nothing decision: either we save the bluefin now or we almost certainly condemn the species to extinction within the next decade. The EU must show that it is serious about reforming its fisheries policies by saving the bluefin while it still can,” said Saskia Richartz, Greenpeace EU oceans policy director.

“Atlantic bluefin tuna must be given a break – especially after the EU’s failure to follow the science in international fisheries management. A global trade ban is the only way to avoid this and enable a sustainable fishery in future,” said Dr Sergi Tudela, Head of Fisheries at WWF Mediterranean.

Next steps:

December 2009 - the European Commission will adopt a draft EU position for the March meeting of CITES which will either recommend that the EU support a suspension of the trade in bluefin tuna, or recommend to oppose it.

2nd week of December - likely start of the inter-service consultation; Commission decision on draft EU position may follow as early as 21 December.

January/February 2010 - negotiations in Council working group on international environmental issues.

February 2010 - Council agreement likely to be adopted

13-25 March 2010 - meeting of CITES in Doha, Qatar.

Chronology of events to-date:

15 July 2009 - the Principality of Monaco requests that states co-sponsor its proposal to list bluefin tuna on Appendix I of CITES, effectively proposing a suspension in international trade.

August 2009 - France, the UK, the Netherlands, Germany, Poland and Austria announce their support for Monaco's proposal.

8 September 2009 - the European Commission recommends to the Council that the EU provisionally co-sponsor Monaco's proposal, but also proposes to revisit this decision after the scheduled November ICCAT meeting.

21 September 2009 - six of the EU's seven Mediterranean states, whose fleets are engaged in the tuna fishery (France included), block a Council decision to co-sponsor Monaco's proposal. The French government reverses its position and no longer supports the Monaco proposal.

29 October 2009 - the results from the scientific expert panel of ICCAT mirror previous assessments and demonstrate that the poor state of the stock classifies bluefin tuna as a species that should be protected under CITES.

16 November 2009 - the annual meeting of ICCAT decides to reduce the 2010 quota for bluefin tuna, but the agreed measures have less than a 50 per cent chance of achieving stock recovery. This means that ICCAT has failed to meet its mandate to prevent stock collapse.

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