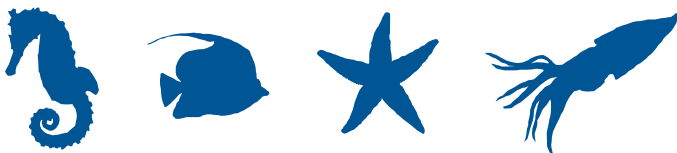




## Defending **Our** Mediterranean

"Greenpeace is committed to defending the health of the world's oceans and the plants, animals and people that depend upon them."

# "Where have all the tuna gone?"





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**Up to two metres long, weighing as much as 700 kilograms, able to sprint as fast as a horse and dive a mile in minutes with a metallic flash, the tuna is one of the kings of the ocean. Like us, it is warm-blooded. Its ability to regulate its body temperature lets it migrate across oceans, swimming thousands of kilometres each year and making it an ideal survivor in a range of conditions. But the tuna cannot survive the ravages of the fishing industry, which is waging a relentless war on its once plentiful kingdom. Urgent action needs to be taken. 2007 may be the last opportunity to save one of the most valuable fish species from commercial extinction.**

Northern bluefin tuna have long been an important part of the Mediterranean economy and way of life. In ancient Rome, tuna fishing and salting were two of the empire's most stable industries. Today, virtually all bluefin tuna from the Mediterranean is exported to Japan and the fish stocks themselves are anything but stable. Vast profits over the last decade have fuelled an industry that has no concern for the future of the species that has been reduced to critical levels, threatening its future and the future of hundreds of fishermen.

The Mediterranean Sea is key to the survival of northern bluefin tuna. It is one of only two breeding areas and the waters surrounding the Balearic Islands are a vital spawning ground. Every year, the fish come to reproduce in the warm Mediterranean waters. And every year, a fleet of fishing vessels races to catch the tuna at this important and vulnerable stage in their life cycle, encircling whole schools with nets known as "purse-seines".

If the targeting of a species in its breeding ground is not madness enough, the fishing fleets catch well beyond the levels allowed by the quota, and much of the fish caught is too young. Bluefin tuna only reach maturity after 5 to 8 years, so fish caught before they reach that age have not had a chance to breed and therefore repopulate the diminishing stocks.

In recent years, a new threat has been added to those already facing the northern bluefin tuna - ranching. Tuna ranching in the Mediterranean combines the damaging impacts of aquaculture with the impacts of a badly managed fishery. Tuna ranching involves catching fish in the wild - further reducing their natural population. There is very little control of how much fish is taken for ranches: it is pushing tuna catches well over the agreed quotas and much is undersized when it is caught. The tuna are then transferred to cages, and fattened up by artificially feeding them other smaller fish. Ironically to produce one kilo of tuna may take as much as 20 kilos of feed - so fueling the cycle of overfishing. The amount needed to feed farmed tuna is so huge it outstrips the catch of those type of fish of the Mediterranean, resulting in fish being brought from outside the Mediterranean and running the risk of introducing disease to local fish populations. Ranching also results in waste food and faeces polluting the waters around the cages.

Tuna populations in the Atlantic and Mediterranean are supposed to be managed by an internationally recognised organisation, with government representation from 41 countries plus the European Community - the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas - ICCAT. So far, these countries have ignored the indisputable evidence about the risk of collapse of the species and have decided, under strong pressure from the fishing industry, to allow the plunder of bluefin tuna to continue.

In its last annual meeting, in 2006, ICCAT set a new bluefin tuna quota and put in place a management plan for the species. This was a crucial meeting for the organisation, as there had been an extremely high level of pirate fishing for the species in the years since the previous quota was set. Both Greenpeace and WWF reported on this pirate fishing, estimating the real catch to be around 50,000 tonnes.

At that meeting scientists were clearer than ever before about the risks faced by the species. They established that the risk of collapse was high and stated that only catches around 15,000 tonnes a year would "have potential to address the declines and initiate recovery". Not only was this advice ignored by setting up rights to catch almost 30,000 tonnes of bluefin tuna in 2007 but the new rules that were approved will only enter into force by August 2007. By then, this year's fishing season will be already over, and bluefin tuna will have suffered another year of rampant overfishing.

This is a dire situation for bluefin tuna. With no new management rules in place for the 2007 fishing season, quota set at twice the level that scientists believe would allow the species to recover, and a fleet with the capacity to catch over 50,000 tonnes of this valuable fish, the fishery should immediately be closed. Allowing it to continue is a risk that we cannot afford to take.

Much of the fishing pressure this year is going to be concentrated in the waters north of Libya, one of the frontiers of the fishery, following the decline in other fishing areas such as the Balearic Islands. New rules and sustainable quotas are required before any fishing should take place in new areas, and already exploited areas such as the Balearic Islands breeding ground must be given full protection as marine reserves to give bluefin tuna secure refuges to rebuild their population.

Time is running out for the northern bluefin tuna of the Mediterranean. Unless serious steps are taken now, the countries member to ICCAT will be remembered as managing the collapse of one of the most important and profitable fisheries of our time, the decimation of one of the oceans' champion species, and the disintegration of a way of life for the fishermen of the region dependent on this ecosystem for their livelihoods.

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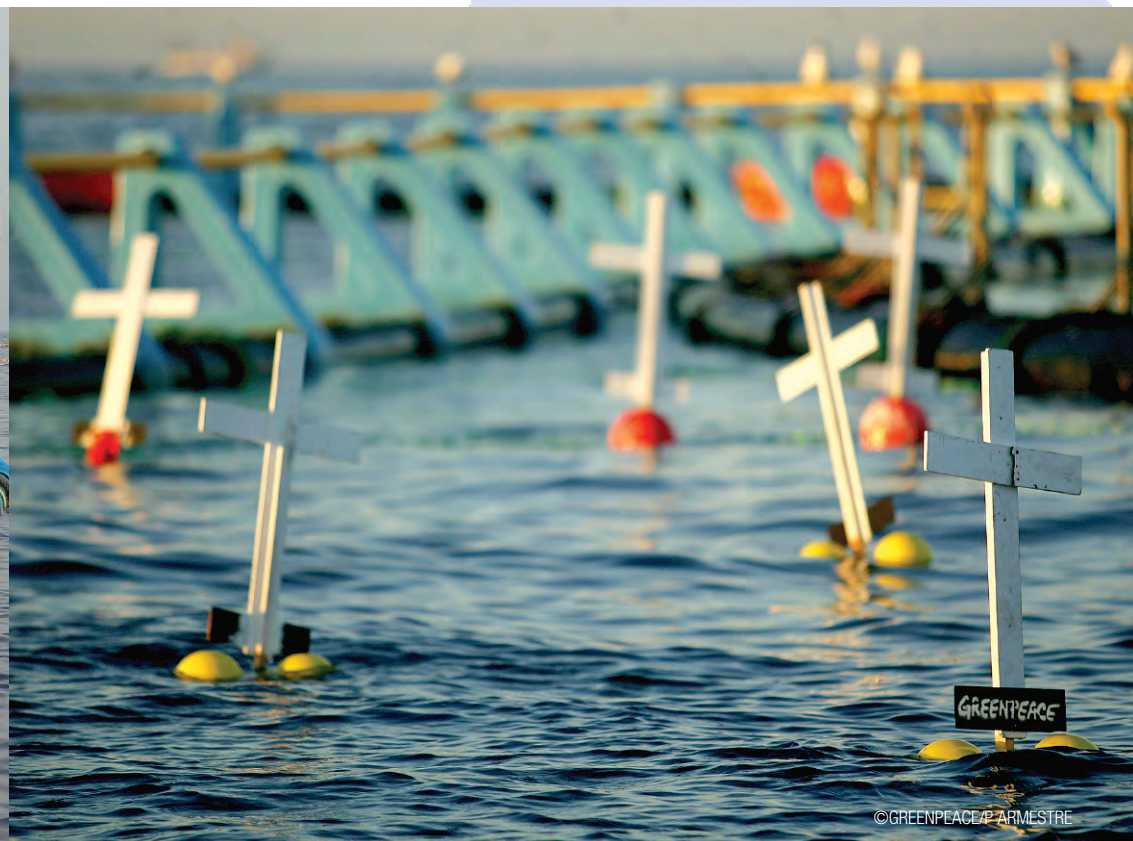


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