

CITES – Last Chance for Atlantic Bluefin Tuna

Oceans cover more than two-thirds of our planet, and are home to 80% of all life on Earth - from microscopic plankton to the largest of the great whales. Rather than protecting these shared treasures, human activity is pushing global oceans into crisis. More than 40% of the world's oceans are heavily degraded; three-quarters of the world's fish stocks are fully exploited, overfished or severely depleted.

The 15th conference of parties (COP15) to the Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) meeting in March 2010 offers a real opportunity to put in place urgently needed protection for some key marine species¹. One central issue at this year's meeting is Proposal 19, spearheaded by Monaco, to list Atlantic bluefin tuna on Appendix I of the Convention. An Appendix I listing is the highest level of protection that CITES offers, and is used for the most endangered species. In practical terms if agreed, it means there will be a (temporary) ban on selling Atlantic bluefin on international markets.

The bluefin tuna crisis is the most visible example of the gross mismanagement of marine resources in recent years. The International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) has failed so badly that the species is on the brink of commercial extinction. An Appendix I listing may be its last hope.

The Atlantic Bluefin tuna crisis

Atlantic bluefin tuna is native to the Western and Eastern Atlantic, as well as the Mediterranean Sea. Bluefin tuna weigh up to 700kg and can reach 3 metres in length. The highly migratory species can swim as fast as 60 mph an hour, and travels thousands of miles in its lifetime. As one of the top predators in the Mediterranean, bluefin is crucial to its delicate ecosystem.

Bluefin tuna is also one of the most highly valued tuna species in the world. The Mediterranean bluefin tuna fishery alone is worth \$1 billion US dollars. The bulk of bluefin is exported to Japan, where it is consumed as sushi and sashimi – and where a single fish can fetch up to \$100,000.

There simply aren't enough fish to sustain the world's insatiable appetite. In 1999, Greenpeace recorded how Mediterranean stocks of bluefin tuna had declined by 80%. The situation has only gotten worse. In October 2009, ICCAT scientists found there is a greater than 95% probability that the current spawning biomass of Atlantic bluefin is less than 15% of what it was before industrial fishing began.

¹ With 175 member parties, CITES is one of the most widely accepted, and successful of all environmental treaties – since its adoption in 1973, it has helped bring many plant and animal species back from the brink of extinction, and has prevented numerous others from reaching that point.

ICCAT has repeatedly proved itself incapable of managing the Atlantic bluefin stock

The abject failure of the countries party to ICCAT, to protect bluefin stocks led a 2008 independent review panel to call the management of the fishery an 'international disgrace'. The panel had been commissioned by ICCAT itself.

ICCAT and its contracting parties, in particular EU and Mediterranean countries that take most of the catch, have repeatedly rejected scientific recommendations to limit catch quotas and protect spawning grounds. ICCAT's own scientists have been sounding the alarm on the dire state of bluefin stocks for over a decade. From 2006, they recommended catch quotas of no more than 15,000 tonnes – and no fishing at all in spawning grounds during crucial breeding seasons (May and June). Not only did bluefin fishing nations such as France, Spain and Italy and others reject this advice but they actually started to build bigger, more efficient fishing vessels.

ICCAT member countries have also failed to even stick to the Commission's extremely limited agreements. Increasingly high levels of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing have compounded the crisis. In 2007 for instance, France fished at levels 53% above its quota, meaning that every third fish was illegal. Greenpeace has documented numerous incidences of illegal fishing of bluefin tuna in recent years².

ICCAT's failures:

- It is estimated that the total catch in 2007 was 61,100 tonnes – twice the agreed legal catch limit and more than 4 times the recommended level.
- The 2008 'recovery' plan allowed a legal catch limit 47% above scientific recommendations.
- The 2009 quota of 22,500 tonnes was still more than a third (7,500 tonnes) over the less precautionary recommended limit. The management plan failed to protect spawning population and only shortened the purse seine fishing season (responsible for the bulk of illegal catches) by 10 days.
- By November 2009, with the latest science recommending that to have even a 50% chance of stock recovery by 2023, the annual eastern Atlantic catch limit must be capped at 8,000 tonnes – the EU, Mediterranean fishing nations, and Japan forced through a catch quota of 13,500 tonnes.
- In February 2010, the ICCAT Secretariat admitted that more than six months after the end of the 2009 fishing season, over 50% of catch reports failed to comply with its new rules designed to combat IUU fishing.

Just a handful of countries have pushed bluefin to the brink

The EU, just one of 45 contracting parties to ICCAT, takes over 55% of the bluefin catch, and has been responsible for most illegal fishing.

Unfair allocation of resources is typical of marine exploitation worldwide. Developed nations take most of the fish, and the profits. For developing countries, most of which have little or no access to tuna fisheries, to enjoy the benefit of their exploitation – often in their waters – there has to be a fishery left for them.

Industrialised nations have a responsibility to clean up their act, by creating conditions for sustainable marine management, and voting to save bluefin from commercial extinction. Developing nations must stand up to industrialised country bullying and vote to ensure there is a fishery for their future.

2 See the Greenpeace report "Pirate Booty: How ICCAT is failing to regulate pirate fishing at www.greenpeace.org/international/press/reports/pirate-booty

CITES is the appropriate body to protect endangered bluefin tuna

In recent years, members of CITES have started to recognise that large-scale commercial species deserve the same protection as rare and 'exotic' species. Some governments, however, persist on making a false distinction, and in using this to undermine attempts to protect species like bluefin, by arguing that it is not CITES' job to protect them.

CITES does not manage fisheries

Japan and others, for example, are lobbying hard against the Monaco Proposal, one argument they repeatedly use is that it is ICCAT and not CITES that is the appropriate body to manage the bluefin fishery.

Greenpeace agrees. It is not the responsibility of CITES to manage the fishery. But, it is, however, responsible for protecting bluefin, as it would any species endangered by global trade – by stopping international trade until stocks recover.

Importantly, the Monaco Proposal recognises the different roles of CITES and ICCAT, and the need for the two organisations to collaborate to ensure the long-term health of the fishery. The proposal is accompanied by a draft Resolution that would allow the species to be downlisted as soon as stocks show signs of recovery and ICCAT has proved itself capable of managing the fishery.

Listing must be on Appendix I

Bluefin is now so endangered that it fully qualifies for an Appendix I listing. There have been some suggestions to list it on Appendix II. This must not be allowed to happen. Article XIV.4 of the CITES Convention means parties to ICCAT would not be bound by the rules of an Appendix II listing, making it ineffective.

No excuse for any delay

Some countries, such as France and Italy are supporting the listing, but only on condition of an 18-month delay. This is unacceptable. ICCAT cannot be trusted to manage the fishery, and allowing another fishing season will put even more pressure on the bluefin stocks. A delay is only putting off the inevitable, and allows countries to attempt to undermine the ban behind closed doors.

If the bluefin fishery is to have a future then an Appendix I listing is essential. The *temporary* ban would allow Atlantic bluefin tuna the time and space the species needs to recover, and fishing to be resumed under sustainable conditions. These conditions are dependent on scientific recommendations on quotas being adhered to, a sharp reduction in fishing capacity, and protection of the bluefin spawning grounds.

Appendix I listing will give countries time to adapt – and help tackle IUU fishing

An Appendix I listing would also make IUU fishing of Atlantic bluefin virtually impossible – helping a great deal to tackle the ever-growing problem of pirate fishing. ICCAT member countries will be able to use the time the listing is in force to improve their monitoring, control and surveillance capabilities. They will also be able to adapt their fleets to the reduced catches and fishing seasons required for a sustainable fishery.

Global oceans in crisis – the case for marine reserves

While the Atlantic bluefin crisis is the worst example of appalling fisheries management in recent years, it is far from the only one. Global fisheries management is a disgrace, from North Sea cod to Atlantic eel, to Pacific bigeye and yellowfin tuna, fish stocks around the world are in serious trouble.

The number of other marine proposals on the table at this year's CITES meeting give some idea of how far reaching the crisis is. Proposals to protect numerous shark species: including scalloped hammerheads, oceanic whitetips and porbeagles, as well as spiny dogfish and pink and red corals are all up for discussion³.

Regional fisheries management organisations and governments worldwide have failed to learn the lessons from the collapse of fisheries such as Atlantic Cod. They refuse to listen to the advice of their own scientists releasing quotas far above sustainable catch levels, and failing to tackle the ever-growing problem of IUU fishing.

3 Greenpeace's positions on these proposals are laid out in 'While Stocks Last', available at www.greenpeace.org/international/press/reports/while-stocks-last

These failures contravene international law; in particular the UN Fish Stocks Agreement, which obliges parties to apply the ecosystem and precautionary principle in fisheries management. These approaches aim to take into account the whole ecosystem rather than just single species, and ensure the most environmentally precautionary conservation measures are taken to protect species.

It is not too late to save our seas. Greenpeace is campaigning for a global network of marine reserves - national parks at sea - to cover 40% of the world's oceans. Marine reserves are areas closed to all extractive uses, such as fishing and mining. Establishing large-scale networks of marine reserves is urgently needed to protect marine species and their habitats, and also crucial to reverse the decline of global fisheries.

If they are properly designed to cover crucial breeding and spawning grounds, marine reserves also work to help highly migratory species recover, such as tuna and sharks.

For Atlantic bluefin, Greenpeace is campaigning for a marine reserve in the Spanish Balearic islands— critical spawning grounds for the species; that will need to be protected in any future fishery. This includes a submission to the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) to create the reserve.

Marine reserves are only one part of solution. Greenpeace campaigns for sustainable fishing and an end to destructive fishing methods such as bottom-trawling, and has developed sound strategies to fight pirate fishing. Greenpeace also challenges retailers to ensure they only sell fish caught from legal and sustainable sources.

Creating marine reserves will do a lot to make these goals achievable. It's not too late to save our oceans - to shift the balance of human impacts from damage and harm to protection and conservation.

But we must act quickly. If we want fish tomorrow, we need marine reserves today.

Greenpeace Contacts at CITES COP 15

Oliver Knowles,
Greenpeace International oceans campaigner
+44 7545 007 631
oliver.knowles@greenpeace.org

Sebastian Losada,
Greenpeace International oceans policy expert (Spanish speaker),
+34 626 998 254
sebastian.losada@greenpeace.org

John Frizell,
Greenpeace International oceans campaigner
+44 7801 212 999
john.frizell@greenpeace.org

Garabed Kazanjian,
Greenpeace Mediterranean oceans campaigner (Arabic speaker)
+974 6205395
garabad.kazanjian@greenpeace.org