

Greenpeace statement to the 21st Regular Meeting of ICCAT

Close the bluefin tuna fishery now and work with the CITES Convention to enforce such a closure

Failing to save bluefin tuna: at what cost for the ICCAT Commission?

As far back as 2002, ICCAT contracting parties agreed on a bluefin tuna management plan which disregarded the scientific advice available at the time. Additionally, by not putting limits at that time to a fishery in rapid expansion in the Mediterranean, paved the way for huge investments which resulted in the building up of an enormous fishing and farming capacity. Millions of euros in benefits have been made since by a few fishing, farming and trading companies from a small number of countries.

Most ICCAT members could not imagine at the time that the Atlantic bluefin tuna fishery would have such a detrimental effect on the image and functioning of ICCAT as a management body in the years to follow. ICCAT has 48 contracting parties. Just eight of them¹ obtain the bulk of the benefits from the Eastern bluefin tuna fishery,² the one where mismanagement is more evident and which has brought this Commission to the difficult position it is now at. The extent of mismanagement in the Eastern bluefin tuna fishery has been such that it has become embarrassing. In 2008, the independent panel conducting the ICCAT performance review recommended “*the suspension of fishing on bluefin tuna in the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean*”. According to the panel “*the management by ICCAT CPCs of this bluefin tuna fishery in the Mediterranean is widely seen as an **international disgrace***”, and is “*a fundamental failing of ICCAT processes, of CPCs commitment to compliance, good governance and adherence to international law.*”³

Sound fisheries management? Come back later!

Since the extent of illegal practices in the Mediterranean bluefin tuna fishery became known to the wider public, the approach of this Commission has been that of *damage control*. The recent history of the management of Atlantic bluefin tuna is that of countries bargaining to do as little as possible in order to avoid the criticism derived from management decisions which are against the objectives of this Commission.

In **November 2006** a new bluefin tuna management plan was approved. While both the quota and the fishing season were – once again – far from those recommended by scientists, ICCAT members gave assurances that the management plan was built on the basis of strong control measures which would guarantee compliance and on a commitment to act over the main problem in the fishery: excess fishing capacity.

In **November 2007**, ICCAT had to face again enormous criticism arising from yet another year of general disrespect for the rules. Greenpeace presented compelling evidence of illegal fishing.⁴ The ICCAT SCRS estimated a catch of 61,000 t of eastern bluefin tuna in 2007.⁵ Those contracting parties benefiting from the fishery didn't accept a proposal to review the relevant recommendation in force and, in turn, a proposal to host a “*Meeting of managers and stakeholders of Atlantic Bluefin Fishing*” in Tokyo, in **March 2008** was agreed. Its main outcome was a declaration in which managers and stakeholders committed to, among others: “*fully comply with all the pertinent conservation and management measures adopted by ICCAT, and in particular, the provisions of the bluefin tuna recovery plan*”.⁶ A pitiful result for such an expensive exercise.⁷

In **November 2008** the Commission had to face the continuing lack of control in the fishery and agreed on a *reviewed* version of the bluefin tuna *recovery* plan, with new control measures, a decreased TAC, a shorter fishing season – although still well above available scientific advice. It was clear during the discussions that relevant countries were not willing to accept any serious commitments to decrease fishing capacity.

Continued non-compliance in the fishery

Improvements in the control of fishing activities in the bluefin tuna fishery are clearly not enough, particularly

- 1 The European Community, Morocco, Japan, Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, Turkey and Croatia.
- 2 Chinese Taipei, China, Syria, Iceland and Egypt have quotas of less than 70 tonnes. Norway has set aside its quota for conservation purposes.
- 3 G.D. Hurry, M. Hayashi and J.J. Maguire. *Report of the Review. ICCAT*. September 2008.
- 4 Losada, Sebastian. *Pirate Booty: How ICCAT is failing to curb IUU fishing*. Greenpeace, September 2007.
- 5 Report of the Standing Committee on Research and Statistics. September 29 to October 3, 2008. Madrid, Spain.
- 6 ICCAT Circular # 612 / 2008. *Report of the meeting of managers and stakeholders in Atlantic bluefin tuna*.
- 7 The 2008 account of its control activities by the EC noted: “*It can be concluded that despite all meetings with the stakeholders convened by the Commission and Member States before the start of the season, it has not been a priority of most operators in the fishery to comply with the ICCAT legal requirements.*”

after more than three years announcing that “*next year it will be the year of compliance*”:

- a report by the EC concludes that in 2009 infractions were found in **one third of all the tug boats** inspected;⁸ the equivalent report from the 2008 fishing season⁹ found infringements in 40% of the inspections on tug boats. This is not a very encouraging improvement. This seems to imply that one third of the bluefin tuna transported in the Mediterranean for its caging is IUU fish.
- during the special meeting of the ICCAT Compliance Committee last March 2009¹⁰ it was observed that carrier vessels were not submitting VMS data to the Secretariat. It was also observed that “*some CPCs have not yet established transmission of VMS data to the Secretariat*”.
- numerous problems have continued to be reported in relation to Joint Fishing operations.
- one of the most important elements of the scheme set up by ICCAT to ensure compliance in the bluefin tuna fishery is the bluefin **catch documentation scheme**. There has been a minimum compliance with the five days reporting requirement and the quality of data has been very poor in many cases.¹¹

Some of the above are examples of the lax enforcement of regulations by both fishing, farming and importing nations engaged in this fishery. If a fishing vessel, tug boat or farm does not comply with the current management plan, the tuna caught, transported or fattened should be confiscated as IUU fish. If a country does not comply with the VMS requirements, it should not get access to the fishery and/or the market place. The reality is that recent history teaches operators that a vessel or country can fail to comply, and nothing, or very little, will happen.

Conclusions

1) Closing the bluefin tuna fishery is the only credible option available to ICCAT

Bluefin tuna is heavily overexploited and there is a high risk of collapse of the fishery. Fishing and farming capacity in the bluefin tuna fishery continue to be well above sustainable limits. Recent attempts by the Commission to ensure compliance with the relevant regulations have deemed failed. It is obvious that this would be even harder under an scenario with a smaller quota. Until the problem of overcapacity is resolved in a satisfactory manner there is simply no way this Commission will be credible and capable of ensuring that the bluefin tuna fishery is under control. Greenpeace additionally warns that until ICCAT finds a reasonable solution to the issue of applicable growth rates to farmed tuna, new fattening rates, if overestimated, will open the door for massive laundering of IUU catches.

2) The extent of depletion of the stock has left no other option available

The results of the projections elaborated by the ICCAT SCRS at its last meeting,¹² show that an annual Eastern bluefin tuna TAC of 15,000 t for the next 10 years would result in a probability of 87% that the spawning biomass in 2019 will remain below 20% the virgin biomass level. The probability that the stock continues to decline during 2009-2019 is additionally estimated at 26%. This is assuming a perfect implementation of such quota, something which this Commission has, to date, proved unable to ensure.

Therefore, the latest scientific work of the SCRS clearly shows that a 15,000 t quota would not result in a significant probability to recover the stock over a reasonable timeframe. The figures are not very different for a TAC of 8,000 t.¹³ Such is the result of the failure of ICCAT to act based on science for far too long.

3) A CITES listing of Atlantic bluefin tuna under Appendix I of the Convention

The endangered status of the bluefin tuna stocks has resulted in a proposal by Monaco to list the species on Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). We have stressed and will continue to stress that CITES does not manage fisheries. To the same extent that what CITES contracting parties decide on the Monaco proposal should be based in the extent of depletion of the species, and not on what this Commission agrees upon.

The SCRS concluded that the probability that the population of Atlantic bluefin tuna (both western and eastern stocks) meets the criteria for CITES Appendix I (i.e. is at a level below 15-20% of the historical baseline) is virtually 100 per cent. Several countries around the world have already indicated their support for the proposal, which will be considered at CITES CoP15, in March 2010.

8 Report on the implementation of the ICCAT Recovery Plan for Bluefin tuna in 2009. 15 October 2009.

9 Specific Report regarding the implementation of the Joint Development Plan for bluefin tuna fishing activities in 2008 in the Mediterranean Sea and Atlantic – Preliminary version (updated to 15 October except where otherwise indicated).

10 Document COC-302/2009. Report of the inter-sessional meeting of the Compliance Committee.

11 See page 17 of document COC-303/2009. Secretariat Report to the Compliance Committee.

12 See Document PA2-604/2009.

13 A TAC of 8,000 t would result in a 77% probability of SSB in 2019 being lower than 20% the virgin biomass level.