

Taking Tuna Out of the Can

Retailer's Roles in Rescuing
the World's Favourite Fish

Third Edition: January 2009



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Greenpeace is an independent global campaigning organisation that acts to change attitudes and behaviour, to protect and conserve the environment and to promote peace.

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Global tuna stocks are in big trouble. Tuna is one of the world's favourite fish, the staple protein in the diet of millions, and the fish at the core of the luxury sashimi market. Perhaps the best known example is the Southern Bluefin Tuna. Since industrial scale fishing of southern bluefin tuna began in the 1950s, the biomass of reproducing fish has been reduced by some 95%¹ and the species was listed as endangered by the IUCN in 1996². The depletion of the other major global tuna stocks has been recorded by fisheries scientists over many years. Today, there is the real possibility that commercial extinction is imminent for some stocks of these valuable and iconic species.

As tuna stocks in their own waters disappear, industrial tuna fleets from Japan, EU member states, Taiwan, Korea, the US and increasingly China and the Philippines are travelling further and further away to fill their holds. Pirate fishing is also rife within the tuna fishing industry. Combined with the rise in fishing effort this illegal fishing is endangering tuna in all oceans.

If retailers want to continue selling tuna in the future, then they need to take action now. This means an end to buying from unsustainable, unfair and, in many cases, illegal sources. To be able to ensure that the tuna bought is sustainably caught from well managed fisheries, retailers must be able to trace the chain of custody of the tuna they buy. This means knowing, where, when and how it was caught, and also that the fishing operator pays a fair price for their fishing license from the coastal states whose resources they exploit.



Above: Canned Skipjack tuna for sale in a supermarket © Greenpeace/Behring

Left: Bluefin tuna through net © Greenpeace/Newman

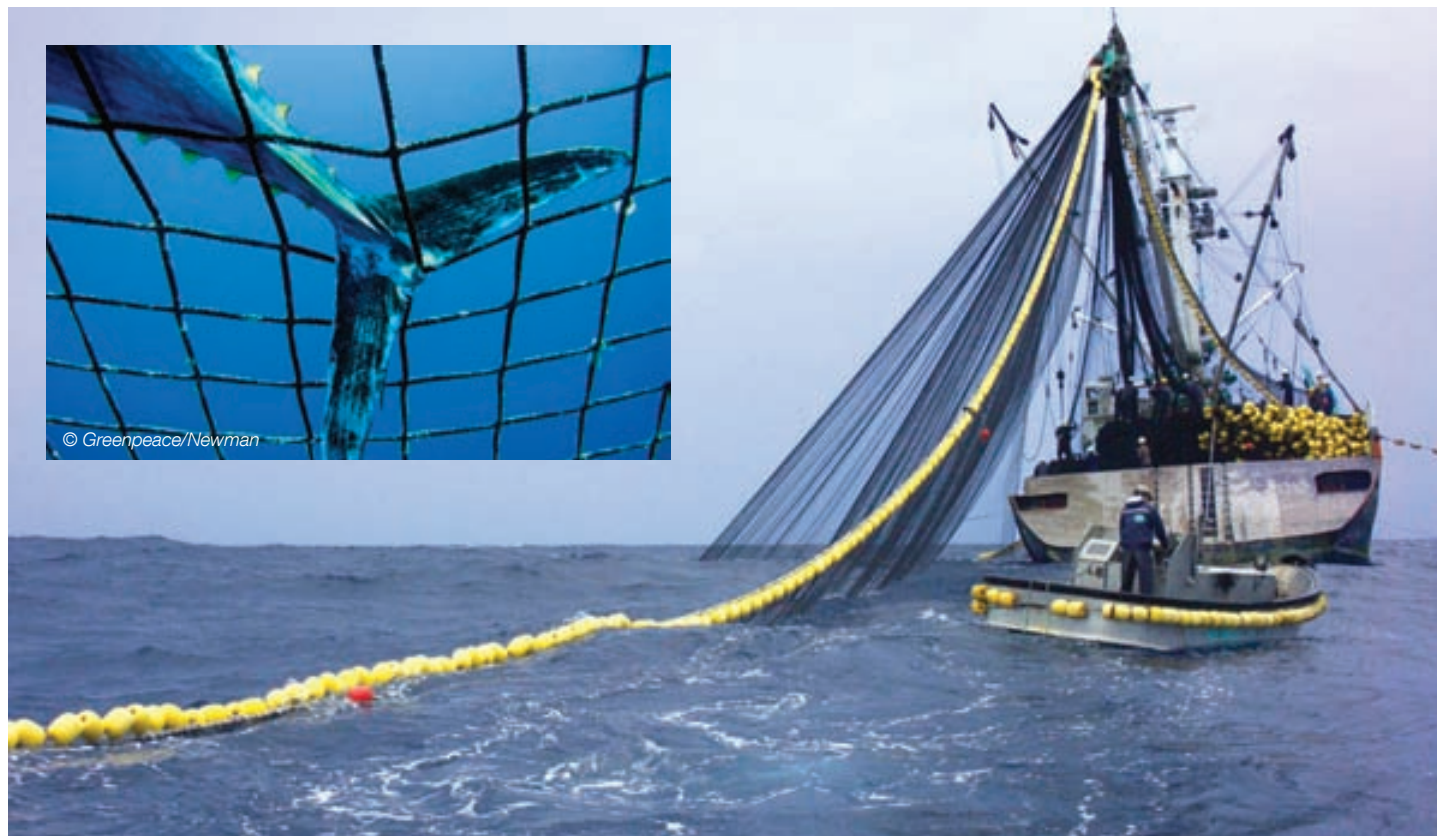
1 CSIRO Marine Research (1999) Southern Bluefin Tuna Information Sheet No 31: <http://www.marine.csiro.au/LeafletsFolder/pdfsheets/31tuna.pdf>

2 IUCN (2007) IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Publ. IUCN <http://www.iucnredlist.org/>

Tuna Facts in a Can

STOCKS IN PERIL:

- There are seven species of tuna that are of principal commercial interest: albacore, Atlantic bluefin, bigeye, Pacific bluefin, skipjack³, southern bluefin, and yellowfin are the single most important resource exploited in international waters⁴.
- Tuna stocks worldwide are in trouble. All 23 identified, commercially exploited stocks are heavily fished, with at least nine classified as fully fished and a further four classified as overexploited or depleted⁵. Three stocks are classified as Critically Endangered, three as Endangered, and three as Vulnerable to extinction⁶.
- The bluefin and bigeye stocks worldwide are those in the most immediate danger of collapse with some stocks threatened with extinction. The worldwide yellowfin stocks have now also reached a state where over-fishing is suspected to be occurring in all oceans with many stocks in serious decline^{7,8}.
- Skipjack is the highest volume tuna fishery in the world. The huge overcapacity in purse seining fleets⁹, the most common method of catching skipjack, is now undermining both the sustainability of the stocks and the economic viability of the industry itself. With the increasing use of Fish Aggregation Devices (FADS), floating platforms to which tuna are instinctively drawn, the skipjack fisheries are now threatening the survival of the more vulnerable bigeye and yellowfin fisheries as large amounts of juveniles of these species are caught as bycatch.



Purse seiner Yu Wen 101 hauls its net in the Pacific Ocean as one of its skiff boats controls the net. © Greenpeace/Grace

3 Despite being perhaps the most widely known 'tuna', skipjack are technically not a tuna, belonging instead to the mackerel (Scombridae) family.

4 FAO (2006) State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture (SOFIA) - SOFIA 2006. FAO

5 Maguire, J.; Sissenwine, M.; Csirke, J.; Grainger, R.; Garcia, S. (2006) The state of world highly migratory, straddling and other high seas fishery resources and associated species. FAO Fisheries Technical Paper. No. 495. Rome: FAO.

6 The IUCN assessments are now over ten years old and thus out of date. The status of the stocks however cannot be considered as improved since the last assessments and if anything, the status of the species is likely to have deteriorated since the assessments.

7 Marsh, J. (2006a) Seafood Watch Seafood Report: Yellowfin tuna (*Thunnus albacares*) pub. Monterey Bay Aquarium, Final Report. 91pp http://www.montereybayaquarium.org/cr_cr_seafoodwatch/content/media/MBA_SeafoodWatch_YellowfinTunaReport.pdf

8 Marsh, J. (2006b) Seafood Watch Seafood Report: Bigeye tuna (*Thunnus obesus*) pub. Monterey Bay Aquarium, Final Report. 78pp. http://www.montereybayaquarium.org/cr_cr_seafoodwatch/content/media/MBA_SeafoodWatch_BigeyeTunaReport.pdf

9 Purse seiners send a small boat out with one end of a massive net, the big boat then circles the shoal of fish, with the net returning to the small boat. The net is drawn tight or "purse" at the base and hauled alongside and on board the parent ship.

WASTED MARINE LIFE:



Many species of turtle are accidentally hooked and killed on tuna longlines each year in the Pacific. © Greenpeace

- Global pelagic long-line fleets¹⁰ set around 1.4 billion hooks each year. Turtles, sharks and birds are caught accidentally as bycatch. The problem is a big one. It is estimated that around 250,000 loggerhead turtles and 60,000 leatherback turtles are caught as bycatch annually¹¹. The great leatherback turtle may be threatened with extinction as a result of interactions with tuna and other fisheries¹². Populations of species such as blue sharks have been markedly depleted by tuna fishing operations in the central Pacific¹³.

- Only a small percentage of tuna fleets have independent observers on board to record the activities of the vessels. This makes it much easier for fleets to under-report their catch, and to illegally de-finn sharks, devastating the world's shark populations.



Shark fins hanging to dry on the longliner *Win Full 6* in international waters in the Central Pacific. © Greenpeace/Grace

- In addition, purse seiners increasingly use FADS that as well as attracting skipjack, entice other marine species including young bigeye and yellowfin. These young tuna are vital for breeding and future stock growth, which together with other marine life such as sharks and unwanted fish get caught and killed as bycatch.

¹⁰ Long-lining uses fishing lines over 100 km long strung with up to 3,000 baited hooks set up to 100m apart. Sharks, turtles and seabirds take the baits and get caught on the hooks.

¹¹ Lewison, R.L., Freeman, S.A. & Crowder, L.B. (2004) *Ecology Letters* 7: 221-231

¹² Ferraroli, S., Georges, J-Y., Gaspar, P. & le Maho, Y. (2004) Where leatherback turtles meet fisheries. *Nature*, 429: 521

¹³ Schindler, D.E., Essington, T.E. Kitchell, J.F., Boggs, C. & Hilborn, R. (2002) Sharks and Tunas: Fisheries impacts on predators with contrasting life histories *Ecological Applications* 12 (3): 735-748

STOLEN FROM THE POOR:

- Big fishing nations such as Japan, EU member states, Taiwan, Korea and China negotiate access agreements to fish for tuna in developing countries coastal waters. The agreements end up being incredibly unfair. Coastal states only receive about 5-6% of the value of this multi-billion dollar industry.
- Lack of adequate regulations and the practice of transferring catch at sea (transshipping), exacerbates pirate fishing. This contributes to the ongoing decline of tuna stocks and loss of income for poor developing states.



Top: Crew members are photographed changing the name of the *Wen Teng 4*, a pirate vessel black-listed under the Inter American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATCC). Port of Suva, Fiji Islands, 2006. © Greenpeace/Turaganivalu

Above: Solomon Islanders have noticed a sharp decline in the size of tuna in their catch and for sale at local markets. © Greenpeace/Behring

Left: Yellowfin tuna © Greenpeace/Behring

Remove the Worst and Improve the Rest

What Retailers Should Do

Bluefin tuna: The bluefin tuna crisis is so critical that retailers must stop selling all bluefin tuna until stocks recover.

Bigeye and Yellowfin tuna: Retailers should stop selling bigeye and yellowfin tuna until fishing effort of these fisheries is reduced to sustainable levels.

Skipjack tuna: Skipjack are in a better shape than most other tuna species but all skipjack tuna caught by purse seiners using FADS should be rejected as unsustainable because of the bycatch problem which is undermining the recovery of the threatened bigeye and yellowfin fisheries.

Retailers should also exercise extreme care in purchasing skipjack because of widespread illegal fishing and unfair returns to developing coastal states. They must examine their products and supply chain with care and seek best practice sustainable and equitable supplies.

Albacore tuna and others: Declined stocks in some oceans, illegal fisheries and unfair returns to coastal states are a major source of concern for these fisheries and retailers should examine their products and supply chain with care and seek for best practice sustainable and equitable supplies.

Retailers are also urged to support the historical move by eight Pacific Island Countries¹⁴ in May 2008 to close the international waters of the Pacific that lie between the Pacific Island Countries (see map 1, areas 1 & 2) to all tuna fishing from 2010 onwards. In an attempt to restore the troubled tuna stocks of the Pacific and to protect the broader marine environment the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission also agreed to close these areas to purse seining at its 5th Session from 2010 onwards. Retailers should ensure that they support the aspirations of the Pacific island countries and do not purchase any tuna caught inside these areas.

Map 1:
Greenpeace is calling for the highlighted areas to be closed to all fishing activities and designated as marine reserves.
© Greenpeace



MAKE SURE YOUR TUNA IS LEGAL:

Only by knowing the chain of custody of tuna right back to the boat that caught it, can retailers ensure the product they sell comes from legal sources. The first step is to check that none of the vessels and companies traded with are on the Greenpeace blacklisted vessels database at: <http://blacklist.greenpeace.org> Tuna should be rejected if it comes from operations that have transferred tuna at sea and/or cannot guarantee 100% observer coverage on their vessels. Observers ensure compliance to conservation and management measures.



Chinese workers from Shandong province work in the hold of fishing vessel unloading tuna in Pohnpei Island, Federated States of Micronesia. © Greenpeace/Behring

Support the Best Sustainable Equitable Alternatives

Retailers should actively seek and support more sustainable and equitable sources of tuna. The best option for this is well-managed domestic, small-scale pole-and-line and troll tuna¹⁴ fisheries in developing country coastal states from intact stocks.

If tuna caught via fishing techniques other than pole-and-line or troll is purchased, retailers need to ensure that for purse seine vessels the fishery does not use FADS and has observers on board 100% of the time. The vessels should also use all possible means to avoid dolphin or other bycatch. Long-line vessels should have 100% observers and state of the art mitigation methods to avoid bycatch.

For equitable alternatives, purchasing tuna directly from the coastal state operators is always preferred, as access agreements with foreign fishing nations are by and large incredibly unfair to the developing coastal states.

If tuna is purchased from operators of these foreign fishing fleets, retailers need to ensure these companies have fair access agreements with strong sustainable and equitable standards¹⁵.

This means that the financial returns of the agreements need to be:

- in the region of 30% or more of the value of the fishery
- agreements are negotiated between flag and coastal states (no private company deals) and;
- accompanied by effective means for monitoring, control and surveillance of the fishery operations.

In addition, retailers should demand that the companies they purchase tuna from have sustainable and equitable policies and are actively engaged in advocating sustainable management of tuna stocks at the political level.



School of Tuna © Greenpeace/Newman

14 Trolling is a method of fishing in which some form of bait is drawn on a line through the water.

15 For full detailed recommendations please refer to section 5 of Greenpeace's report: Taking Tuna out of the Can; Rescue plan for world's favourite fish. <http://www.greenpeace.org/international/press/reports/taking-tuna-out-of-the-can>