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IP/10/172

Brussels, 22 February 2010

European Commission proposes that EU support ban on international trade in Atlantic bluefin tuna

The European Commission today proposed that the European Union should press for a ban on international trade in Atlantic bluefin tuna to enter into force within the next year. The Commission is deeply concerned that overfishing of Atlantic bluefin tuna driven largely by international trade is seriously depleting stocks of the species. The proposal will be discussed with Member States in order to reach a common EU position for the next meeting of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), taking place in Doha, Qatar, from 13 to 25 March 2010.

European Environment Commissioner Janez Potočnik said: " We have a responsibility to future generations to take decisive action when faced with the likelihood that a species will disappear forever. We have the duty to preserve our natural capital. Since there is a high risk that Atlantic bluefin tuna will soon be gone forever, we have no other choice than to act now and propose a ban on international trade"

Maria Damanaki, Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, added : "Our aim is to ensure a viable future for the fishermen. This requires healthy bluefin tuna stocks, and it is clear to everyone that overfishing is definitely not the way to go. An important part of the solution we are proposing today is a special arrangement for artisanal fishing vessels".

The Commission is deeply concerned about the poor conservation status of Atlantic bluefin tuna and acknowledges that demand for it is being driven largely by international trade.

While recognising that the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) has taken a number of steps to address this situation since 2006, the Commission considers, on the basis of the most recent scientific data available, that Atlantic bluefin tuna should be included in Appendix I of CITES.

Appendix I groups species threatened with extinction and for which trade must be subject to particularly strict regulation and authorised only in exceptional circumstances. Listing bluefin tuna under Appendix I would mean a ban on international trade in the fish.

The Commission is proposing, however, that the listing should not take effect immediately. The CITES meeting in Doha would indicate that the listing's entry into force would have to be decided by the CITES Standing Committee within 12 months. The Standing Committee would have to base its decision on the latest scientific information available on the situation of the stock and assess the adequacy of any measures adopted by ICCAT when it meets in November 2010.

If the ban enters into force the Commission will see to it that artisanal fishing firms are authorised to supply the EU market with catches stemming from Member States domestic waters.

Further information: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/cites/home_en.htm