
Maria DAMANAKI Member of the European Commission,
responsible for Fisheries and Maritime Affairs Speaking notes
for press conference on the listing of bluefin tuna under the
Convention on international Trade in Endangered Species
(CITES) Press Conference on the Commission's proposal to
the Council in view of the upcoming Conference to the
Convention on international Trade in Endangered Species
Brussels, 22 February 2010

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Press Conference on the Commission's proposal to the Council in view of the upcoming Conference to the Convention on international Trade in Endangered Species

Brussels, 22 February 2010

Ladies and gentlemen,

- Today the Commission is sending out a strong signal. We are showing that not only are we truly concerned with the poor conservation status of Atlantic blue-fin tuna– we are also doing something about it, having also in mind the future of the fisheries, of our fishermen.
- The Commission has been working relentlessly to protect this species through the appropriate instruments and organisations: we have been fighting overcapacity, we have tightened controls and we have played a consistently active role within *the International Convention for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna* (or ICCAT), which is responsible for managing this fishery.
- Over the years, substantial progress has been made within ICCAT through catch limits, recovery plans and other measures.
- However, it is now likely that the criteria for listing the species under CITES Appendix 1 have been met. Scientists tell us that the fishing pressure on this stock is too high and it needs to be reduced if we want to avoid a collapse.
- This is where the Commission sees the *Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species* (CITES) as coming into play. After all, CITES' very task is to protect endangered species from commercial interests that may threaten their survival.

- As the CITES Conference of the Parties in Doha next month will be the last before 2013, we believe that now is the time to act to curb over-exploitation.
- This why today the Commission will put forward to EU Member States its formal proposal to include Atlantic blue-fin tuna under CITES Appendix I, including a number of flanking conditions/measures which constitute a coherent whole.
- What would listing without flanking measures mean in practice? it means that, whether caught in Community waters or in the high seas, the fish could not be sold on the Union's market; imports and exports would be prohibited, as would domestic trade. In short, there would be a total trade ban for the EU.
- However, in the event of a listing I am convinced that we need to preserve artisanal fishing activities as these are undertaken in a sustainable manner with a limited impact on the stock; it is also important to point that artisanal vessels create more jobs per tuna caught than any of the bigger industrial vessels do .
- Needless to say, the Commission and the Member States would also examine how the **existing** money in the European Fisheries Fund can best be used to help fishermen and ship owners cope with the situation.
- So, does this mean that CITES should now take over, leaving ICCAT sidelined? Not at all. On the contrary, ICCAT's work remains invaluable and both bodies should forge closer ties in working together for viable solutions and a level playing field for all operators on the international scene.
- In fact the EU's very proposal for an Appendix I listing is subject to three important conditions that demand a central role for ICCAT.
- First, the listing should not take effect until the November 2010 ICCAT meeting has taken place.
- Second, the CITES Standing Committee will then have to assess the meeting's outcome, taking into consideration the best scientific advice available at that time.
- Third, on the basis of that assessment, the CITES Standing Committee will decide whether or not the listing should enter into force.

Ladies and gentlemen,

- The scientific advice on the state of BFT stocks suggest to us that we have to act now, if we want to have sustainable BFT fisheries in the future.
- Over recent years, the Commission has undoubtedly led the way toward the recovery of blue-fin tuna. We have advocated respect for scientific advice and for the management measures adopted by ICCAT. We have adopted concrete measures ranging from shorter fishing seasons to lower quotas
- Today we remain fully committed to this objective. We will continue fostering compliance with the recovery plans, tightening controls and combating illegal fishing. But we have a unique opportunity that may change the fate of Atlantic blue-fin tuna and we cannot afford to miss it.
- The willingness by international partners to shrink their blue-fin tuna fishing fleet on the one hand and to support the CITES listing on the other will be a litmus test of our own collective determination, as humans, to go beyond cosy declarations of intent and accept the sacrifices that effective environmental protection inevitably demands to guarantee sustainability for the species and its fishery.