
Janez P otočnik European Commissioner for Environment Speaking points for the press Conference on Atlantic bluefin tuna Joint press conference with Commissioner Damanaki 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 2009

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European Commissioner for Environment

Speaking points for the press Conference on Atlantic bluefin tuna

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Joint press conference with Commissioner Damanaki 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 2009

- Bluefin tuna has been fished in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean for centuries, but over the past 60 years overfishing has caused a dramatic decline in its stocks. The population is now less than 15% compared to the unfished level.
- Today the likelihood of the Atlantic bluefin tuna surviving as a species is very low, unless action is taken to protect it.
- Overfishing is being driven by international trade. It has reached a peak in the last 15 years, with large ships catching tuna in the Mediterranean and transferring them alive to fattening farms. From there they are shipped mainly to Japan to supply the market for sushi and sashimi. 80% of the catches in the Mediterranean are exported outside the EU.
- The fishery is regulated by the International Commission on the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna, or ICCAT, but for many years it set catch quotas at levels well above scientific recommendations. And even those quotas were largely exceeded: bluefin tuna has been one of the species most affected by illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.
- ICCAT has recently taken a number of steps to improve its track record. However, the most recent scientific reports show that stocks of Atlantic bluefin tuna are now in such bad shape that the Commission considers it qualifies for inclusion in Appendix I of CITES, the Convention on international trade in endangered species. This is also the view of the European Parliament, incidentally.
- Appendix I groups species threatened with extinction, and listing Atlantic bluefin tuna there would mean a ban on international trade.
- However, the Commission takes the view that the listing should not enter into effect immediately,

in order to give ICCAT one more chance to take the strong conservation measures needed.

- Our proposal is that the CITES Conference of Parties should decide next month to include Atlantic bluefin tuna in Appendix I, but should indicate that the entry into force of the listing would have to be decided within 12 months by the CITES Standing Committee.
- The Standing Committee would base this decision on two elements:
 - first, the latest scientific information available on the situation of the stock
 - and second, an assessment of whether the measures to be adopted within ICCAT at its next meeting in November 2010 are adequate. Adequate means the measures need to ensure a recovery of Atlantic bluefin stocks that would allow international trade to continue without threatening the species with extinction.
- Despite the shortcomings of ICCAT that I mentioned earlier, we must recognise that it did take measures in line with scientific advice for the first time at its meeting last November. This was very encouraging and we want to see ICCAT improve its conservation, management and compliance regime further.
- However, if it fails to do so next November and the Atlantic bluefin's conservation status remains dire, the ban on international trade would enter into force. In such circumstances this would be the only measure that could offer a real chance of saving the species for future generations.
- The Commission's aim is to ensure that Atlantic bluefin tuna and all other marine species are sustainably managed. We believe that opting for a deferred listing of bluefin tuna is the best means to recognise both the relevance and the complementary roles of CITES and ICCAT in conservation.
- Now that the Commission has made its proposal, discussions will start with Member States to define a common position for the EU to take to the CITES conference in Doha. Europe's goal must be to find an international solution which ensures a sustainable future for both the Atlantic bluefin tuna and the fishing industry.