

Annex 2 On the EU negotiating mandate for the annual meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) on 17–27 November

On 17–27 November, contracting parties of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) will meet in Paris to *inter alia* discuss measures for the conservation of stocks and implementation of the ICCAT criteria for the allocation of fishing possibilities.

The Atlantic bluefin tuna has rapidly declined over the past few decades. The eastern stock was classified as Endangered and the western stock as Critically Endangered in the IUCN Red List already in 1996¹. In March 2010, an initiative to ban the commercial trading of Atlantic bluefin tuna by including it in CITES Appendix I failed when the proposal – scientifically endorsed by both the FAO Expert Panel and the CITES Secretariat – was rejected at the 15th Conference of the Parties². Management of Atlantic bluefin tuna stocks is exclusively within the remit of ICCAT.

The upcoming ICCAT annual meeting will be particularly crucial for the future of the Atlantic bluefin tuna. At this meeting the progress of current management plans for reducing fishing capacity and farming capacity will be reviewed³. Furthermore, following the Recommendation⁴ adopted at the 2009 annual meeting, ICCAT members will establish a three-year (2011–2013) recovery plan with *at least* 60% probability to succeed in achieving Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) for bluefin tuna by 2022. This plan will be based on different recovery scenarios and advice from the ICCAT Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS), which is expected to be provided at the meeting. Depending on SCRS's advice, the TAC for 2011 may be adjusted and, if there is a serious threat of collapse, a decision to suspend bluefin tuna fisheries for the eastern stock in 2011 could be taken.

The EU amended its 2007 multi-annual recovery plan for the eastern bluefin tuna stock in 2009, transposing ICCAT recommendations into EU law⁵. At the upcoming November meeting, a further adjustment of farming capacity may be agreed and an assessment of the spawning areas in the Mediterranean is expected to be presented “in view of the establishment of sanctuaries”.

BACKGROUND

When international markets for canned and fresh tuna were developing in the 1960s, commercial bluefin tuna fisheries rapidly expanded following the design of longlines, purse seines, and

¹Safina, C. 1996. *Thunnus thynnus* (Eastern Atlantic stock, Western Atlantic stock). In: IUCN 2010. IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Version 2010.3. <www.iucnredlist.org>.

²<http://www.cites.org/eng/cop/15/sum/E15-Com-I-Rec08.pdf>

³Recommendation 08-05 to establish a new recovery plan for bluefin tuna in the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean. <http://www.iccat.int/Documents/Recs/compendiopdf-e/2008-05-e.pdf>

⁴ Recommendation 09-06, amending Recommendation 08-05 to establish a new recovery plan for bluefin tuna in the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean. <http://www.iccat.int/Documents/Recs/compendiopdf-e/2009-06-e.pdf>

⁵COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 302/2009 of 6 April 2009 concerning a multiannual recovery plan for bluefin tuna in the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean, amending Regulation (EC) No 43/2009 and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1559/2007.

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2009:096:0001:0030:EN:PDF>

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/activities/committees/studies/download.do?language=en&file=29811>, pp 81.

freezing equipment allowing frozen tuna to be shipped long distances. In the 1970s, bluefin tuna became a highly demanded delicacy for the Japanese sushi and sashimi market. In the past, bluefin tuna fishing was limited to the western and eastern Atlantic populations. However, over the last decade, new fisheries have emerged in the high seas of the Central Atlantic, where both bluefin tuna stocks migrate and congregate, and where management is challenging. Spawning aggregations in the Mediterranean are also being targeted by industrial purse seine fleets. This means that bluefin tuna is now being exploited throughout its distribution range, and all spawning areas are targeted for the first time in the history of this fishery.

The high prices offered in Japan fuelled the development of tuna farming in the Mediterranean in the 1990s, which involves the fattening of wild-caught bluefin tuna in cages. In 2006, the total capacity of tuna farming in the Mediterranean was 55,300 tonnes, substantially above the annual eastern bluefin tuna quota of 32,000 tonnes, and it is now seen as an incentive for overfishing, particularly of the eastern Atlantic stock⁶. The boom in the tuna farming industry fuelled a similar development in the capacity of industrial purse seine fleets, involving substantial EU subsidies. In 2007, catches of bluefin tuna from the eastern stock were estimated to be around 61,000 tonnes, which was twice as much as the allocated quota⁷. Approximately 80% of the volume of Atlantic bluefin tuna harvested in the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean was exported to Japan (around 30,000 tonnes in 2007).

Although ICCAT has introduced various management and conservation measures over the past 40 years, overfishing of bluefin tuna has continued, mainly as a result of quotas consistently being set far above levels recommended by scientists and rampant illegal fishing⁸. In 1998, ICCAT agreed on a 20-year rebuilding plan aimed to achieve MSY (with at least 50% probability), but this has already miserably failed to reach its target⁹. The ICCAT stock assessment in 2008¹⁰, estimated the spawning stock in the western population to be between 18 and 27% of the (pre-exploitation) 1975 level, with a fishing mortality 30% higher than the level needed to achieve MSY. While the eastern population is considered larger, the 2008 assessment estimated that the spawning stock was less than 40% of the levels in 1970–1974 and that 2007 fishing mortality was three times higher than necessary to reach MSY¹¹. This stock, formerly with a wide distribution, has already largely disappeared from the North Sea and the Black Sea.

An updated stock assessment is expected in October 2010, with some results from an in-depth study evaluating the status of the eastern stock following management measures adopted at ICCAT's annual meeting in 2008. However, as in the 2008 assessment, lack of sufficient data is likely to make this evaluation uncertain. Substantial under-reporting of total catches in the last

⁶http://wwf.panda.org/what_we_do/footprint/smart_fishing/sustainable_fisheries/bluefin_tuna/overfished_for_decades/massively_overfished/

⁷http://www.iccat.int/Documents/SCRS/ExecSum/BFT_EN.pdf, pg 76

⁸See for example leaked French Navy report to The Guardian in 2009. Article available on: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2009/sep/17/bluefin-tuna-fishing> or ICCAT 2008 Blue fin tuna stock assessment, pg 84. Available online at: http://www.iccat.int/Documents/SCRS/ExecSum/BFT_EN.pdf

⁹<http://www.iccat.int/Documents/Meetings/Docs/Comm/PLE-106-ENG.pdf>

¹⁰ICCAT 2008 Blue fin tuna stock assessment, pg 77. Available online at:

http://www.iccat.int/Documents/SCRS/ExecSum/BFT_EN.pdf

¹¹ICCAT 2008 Blue fin tuna stock assessment, pg 73. Available online at:

http://www.iccat.int/Documents/SCRS/ExecSum/BFT_EN.pdf

decade was also noted in 2008. Several EU Members States – including France, Spain and Portugal – do not appear to have submitted any validated Bluefin Tuna Catch Documentation since 2008¹². It is crucial that the Bluefin Tuna Catch Documentation is regularly submitted to ICCAT, so that catch and effort data can be used to better assess stock status.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to limit the risk of long-term damage to the recovery potential of the stock, a precautionary approach is required. Depending on the 2010 stock assessment and the level of uncertainty it contains, bluefin tuna fisheries for the eastern stock should be suspended in 2011 unless the SCRS is able to determine (with confidence) a “safe” level of total catch.

The EU must ensure that the current multi-annual recovery plan for the eastern bluefin tuna stock (EC 302/2009) will successfully contribute to rebuilding the bluefin population. Given the need for a precautionary approach and the EU commitment to achieve MSY for all stocks by 2015, a recovery plan with at least 60% probability to succeed in achieving MSY for bluefin tuna by 2022 is really insufficient and either a more ambitious plan with 80% or higher probability to succeed should be adopted, or the timeline for recovery should be adjusted. The plan includes provisions such as closed areas and increased observer presence,¹³ which are now being implemented in EU waters.

On scientific basis, all directed fishing for tuna in known spawning grounds of the Mediterranean should be suspended during the spawning season in order not to endanger reproduction and stock recovery. The implementation of current closures should be updated with any information presented by the SCRS at the annual meeting.

Given the known problem of widespread illegal fishing in the Mediterranean, including under-reporting, observer presence needs to be further increased. The current 100% observer presence (as required by the ICCAT Recommendation in 2008¹⁴) during the harvesting process for tuna traps, should be extended to active purse seine catching vessels, active pelagic trawlers, active longline catching vessels and active baitboats where only 20% presence is currently required. However, observer presence will not resolve all the IUU issues. Most of the illegal catches are transferred underwater from seiners to tuna farms, and observers have limited ability to see and judge that. This loophole needs to be taken into account when devising further management measures.

At the October Council meeting, the EU mandate in ICCAT negotiations should include the following:

¹²<http://www.iccat.int/en/BCD.htm>

¹³<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/activities/committees/studies/download.do?language=en&file=29811>

¹⁴Recommendation 08-05 to establish a new recovery plan for bluefin tuna in the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean.
<http://www.iccat.int/Documents/Recs/compendiopdf-e/2008-05-e.pdf>

- *A call for an ambitious three-year recovery plan with a high probability of success (at least > 80%), including a TAC well below the current level of 13,500 tonnes, a closure of the spawning areas in the Mediterranean to fishing, and ideally a suspension of the industrial (purse seine) fishery.*
- *A call for immediate suspension of the industrial fishery in 2011 until the ICCAT SCRS is in a position to advise with confidence as to what level of catch will achieve ICCAT's rebuilding target. This follows the commitment of ICCAT in its Recommendation (09-06) from November 2009 to suspend the fishery if there is a threat of stock collapse.*
- *It is also very important that the pending payback scheme for fishing above the quota of 1,500 tonnes annually for 2011 and 2012 is not lifted again this year in ICCAT with the excuse of the negotiation of the new recovery plan. This would have far reaching consequences not just for the tuna but for the credibility of the CFP.*
- *An extension of the ICCAT observer programme to cover all fishing operations.*