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Media Statement

For immediate release: 8 November 2010

## **International investigation reveals massive fraud in Mediterranean bluefin tuna fishery**

Rome, Italy – Results of an independent investigation launched this weekend have revealed a complex international black market in East Atlantic bluefin tuna worth an estimated \$4 billion, confirming WWF’s repeated warnings over the last decade of broad lack of control in this fishery – with many cases of quota violation, widespread underreporting, use of banned spotter planes, catching of undersized fish, and even governmental misreporting coming to light.

A web of reporters from the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) around the world have spent 8 months digging into the fishery and trade of this highly prized seafood commodity which is also classified as an endangered species. The release of the investigation’s findings falls just a week before international regulators meet in Paris for crucial decisions on the recovery and management of this species.

“The revelations of ICIJ’s exhaustive investigation confirm WWF’s repeated warnings about widespread illegalities rippling throughout the supply chain of the Mediterranean and East Atlantic bluefin tuna fishery and trade,” said Dr Sergi Tudela, Head of Fisheries at WWF Mediterranean. “No consumer, no business, no government, can be sure they are dealing with responsibly caught and traded bluefin tuna – the whole chain is tarnished. Decision-makers at ICCAT have the power to put a stop to this barbarity once and for all at their meeting in Paris later this month. There can be no more burying heads in the sand on this international scandal.”

Speaking of the fishery’s workings between 1998 and 2007, French fishing captain Roger Del Ponte told ICIJ: “Everyone cheated. There were rules, but we didn’t follow them.” ICIJ’s investigations point to France’s fisheries authorities covering up the illegal activities for years and deliberately misreporting to the EU and ICCAT, the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas – the body that sets management rules for the Atlantic bluefin fishery.

Recent data gathered from ICCAT by WWF confirm that rule-flouting in the Mediterranean bluefin tuna fishery was still widespread during the 2010 fishery.

ICCAT has repeatedly failed to reign in illegal fishing in the Mediterranean Sea. The findings of the ICIJ investigation show the gross failure of ICCAT’s new Bluefin Tuna Catch Documentation Scheme (BCD). Flaunted by ICCAT as a solution to the lack of control, the BCD is described in the ICIJ report as “so full of holes that its data are almost useless”.

With this information coming to light, there can be no excuse for the international community at the ICCAT meeting in Paris, on 17-27 November 2010, not to suspend the destructive industrial purse seine fishery and the tuna farming industry that depends on it.

WWF urges ICCAT delegates to heed the clarion call of ICIJ’s report and maximise the opportunity of their Paris meeting to set a sound recovery plan for East Atlantic bluefin tuna: allow only a limited artisanal fishery by cutting total catches to between 0 and 6,000 tonnes per



year, enforce respect for payback rules, and establish no-fishing spawning sanctuaries in key spawning grounds.

**For further information, interviews with WWF fisheries policy experts, or photos, please contact:**

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**See the full ICIJ investigation at:**

<http://www.publicintegrity.org/investigations/icij/>

**The report featured in a tve/BBC World documentary, *Looting the Seas*, 6-7 November 2010:**

<http://www.tve.org/lifeonline/schedule.cfm>

**See WWF's policy position for ICCAT 2010 and political asks of the Paris meeting:**

[http://wwf.panda.org/what\\_we\\_do/footprint/smart\\_fishing/sustainable\\_fisheries/bluefin\\_tuna/bluefin\\_tuna\\_news/?195536/Cut-catch-by-over-half-and-close-spawning-areas-to-save-bluefin-tuna-says-WWF](http://wwf.panda.org/what_we_do/footprint/smart_fishing/sustainable_fisheries/bluefin_tuna/bluefin_tuna_news/?195536/Cut-catch-by-over-half-and-close-spawning-areas-to-save-bluefin-tuna-says-WWF)