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Media Statement

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuna commission fails again to ensure bluefin tuna recovery

Paris, France, 27 November 2010 - - Short-term interests have taken priority over sustainability and common sense at the recent meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) in Paris, which once again failed to establish measures sufficiently stringent to allow the severely overfished Mediterranean bluefin tuna to recover.

Under pressure from the Mediterranean fishing industry and countries benefiting from the highly profitable trade of the sushi favourite red-fleshed bluefin tuna, ICCAT endorsed an annual catch still far too high to enable the species' recovery – and held back efforts to regulate the fishery in the Mediterranean, where the eastern Atlantic population of bluefin tuna migrates to spawn.

Commission members decided to drop the 2011 eastern bluefin fishing quota by only 600 tonnes, from 13,500 tonnes to 12,900 – while WWF was urging a catch of less than 6,000 tonnes in line with more precautionary recommendations to enable recovery of the overexploited fish stocks. What has been decided does almost nothing to help the troubled species recover.

“Greed and mismanagement have taken priority over sustainability and common sense at this ICCAT meeting when it comes to Atlantic bluefin. This measly quota reduction is insufficient to ensure the recovery of bluefin tuna in the Mediterranean Sea,” said Dr Sergi Tudela, Head of WWF Mediterranean's Fisheries Programme.

“After years of observing ICCAT and countless opportunities to do the right thing, it is clear to us that the commission's interests lie not in the sustainable harvesting of bluefin tuna but in pandering to short-term business interests. There have been no effective measures implemented here to deal with widespread illegal and unreported fishing for bluefin tuna in the Mediterranean,” said Tudela.

Recent investigations have shown the high levels of non-compliance and rule-bending still rife across the Mediterranean bluefin tuna fishery. While there are observers on vessels there is a lot of guess work involved, and control measures were not significantly improved at the Paris ICCAT meeting.

“ICCAT members are wilfully blind to the fact that failing to reduce fishing quotas to precautionary levels recommended by science will logically result in the lack of recovery of the species. Before this meeting WWF asked whether ICCAT wants to remain ineffective or help save bluefin tuna. The answer is becoming all too clear,” said Tudela.

WWF welcomed, however, the decision to finally respect the so-called payback regulations, meaning that countries which have overfished would see their quotas reduced accordingly in future to compensate. This application of fishing rules is crucial in Europe at a time when the EU is reforming its common fisheries policy and has pledged to follow science and slash illegal fishing.

This press release and associated material can be found on www.panda.org/tuna
WWF – World Wide Fund For Nature (also known as World Wildlife Fund)



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In 2007 France fished well over 10,000 tonnes, while in 2011 its quota will be less than 1,000 after payback. France's 2011 quota should be allocated among artisanal fleets rather than the industrial purse seine vessels that are responsible for the massive overfishing in the recent past.

WWF is urging that capacity reduction measures put in place today also focus on cutting purse seiners. The new rules dictate that within three years boat capacity in the Mediterranean – currently far too high – should be aligned with fishing quotas. While current figures for boat numbers underestimate real capacity, this is a positive move.

Coming into the meeting ICCAT's chairman Dr Fabio Hazin talked of "the obligation to respect science" and expressed "confidence and consequent optimism" that countries would "act responsibly and adopt measures needed to ensure sustainability" of fish stocks. But ICCAT members countries have fallen short of this expectation.

"Everyone talked of respecting science and wanting to adopt measures to ensure recovery of bluefin tuna in the Mediterranean, but the measures adopted today are highly risky given the dire status of bluefin tuna stocks and all the blanks and unknowns in the current data gathering and analysis," said Dr Tudela of WWF.

ICCAT has for years failed to implement recovery and sustainable management of the bluefin tuna fishery in the Mediterranean Sea.

WWF, an observer at the negotiations during the ICCAT meeting, was calling on governments to end rule-bending and impunity for illegal fishing, and urging the inter-governmental body to implement a science-based management plan that will allow the Atlantic bluefin tuna to recover.

WWF was also calling for the establishment of no-fishing sanctuaries in the six identified spawning grounds in the Mediterranean Sea, but this suggestion was removed entirely from the agenda.

A proposal to ban international trade in Atlantic bluefin tuna through a listing on the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) was defeated in Doha, Qatar last March. But the main harvesting and consuming countries of eastern Atlantic bluefin tuna, the EU and Japan – as well as Norway, Canada and the U.S. – promised to lead in getting sustainable and science-based fisheries management measures adopted at this year's ICCAT meeting.

Japan in particular opposed the CITES listing and stressed that ICCAT was the place to sustainably manage Atlantic bluefin tuna and that countries would show the world ICCAT is capable of ensuring the recovery of the species.

"WWF is disappointed the Doha commitments were not respected here in Paris. We had high hopes that Japan especially would take leadership at this ICCAT meeting in putting in place sustainable and precautionary management measures for bluefin tuna as well as enforcing strict compliance," said Dr Aiko Yamauchi, Fisheries Officer at WWF-Japan. "The results fall short of our high expectations, in spite of fresh evidence of widespread rule-breaking again this year. We are urging Japan to strictly enforce compliance rules."

ICCAT's scientists will next assess bluefin tuna stocks in the East Atlantic in 2012, when they vow to address the uncertainties in data to ensure recommendations are clearer. Data quality must improve but also the methodologies employed to analyse figures. WWF will work with scientists to optimise the process during the next two years.



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For more information

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