

## WWF and Oceana call on tuna commission to shut down Atlantic bluefin tuna fishery



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WWF, the global conservation organization, is urging countries meeting in Brazil this week to agree urgently on a temporary fishing ban for the beleaguered Atlantic bluefin tuna, as an essential measure to avoid imminent stock collapse.

The International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) is gathering in Recife, Brazil for its annual meeting, where the 48 contracting parties are under pressure to decide on measures that will ensure the long-term survival of a species that has long been the victim of illegal and over-fishing, disregard for rules and science, and being targeted by far too many boats.

"WWF wants to see Atlantic bluefin tuna surviving long into the future - both the amazing species and the fishing industry it has supported for thousands of years," said Dr Sergi Tudela, Head of Fisheries at WWF Mediterranean. "This is ICCAT's role, to ensure the sustainable commercial exploitation of bluefin tuna, but it has failed spectacularly in this mandate and there is no option left but to stop fishing and let this wild animal recover. It is the only way forward, there is no possible Plan B."

Daniel Pauly, a world-renowned fisheries expert and Board Member of the environmental group, Oceana, echoed WWF's concerns calling on ICCAT Contracting Parties to not repeat the mistakes of the past.

Dr Pauly said: "The bluefin tuna situation is like a time machine that would transport us back to the year before the collapse of Northern cod. Would we do it again? Will we do it again with bluefin tuna?"

"Oceana also strongly supports the inclusion of this species on Appendix 1 of CITES to stop the main factor driving bluefin tuna to commercial extinction: international trade."

Even ICCAT's own analysis shows that a moratorium will give the best chance of recovery to the seriously overexploited bluefin tuna stocks in the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean. The organization's scientific committee analysed fish stocks at a special meeting in October, demonstrating with their data that Atlantic bluefin tuna fulfils the criteria to be listed on Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), as proposed by the Principality of Monaco and to be voted on next March - a step that would ban all international commercial trade.

WWF sees the trade ban as a necessary parallel measure to a moratorium on fishing. ICCAT's scientific analysis also shows that a suspension of fishing is the only measure with a chance of ensuring Atlantic bluefin tuna stocks no longer meet the criteria for CITES Appendix I by 2019.

"Atlantic bluefin tuna stocks are sadly collapsing even faster than ICCAT's reputation," added Sergi Tudela of WWF. "For ICCAT to justify its existence and show the world it is capable of responsible fisheries management, how can it do anything but stick to the best available science, close the Atlantic bluefin tuna fishery now and give the fish a breather? Anything else would be a slap in the face to science, a slap in the face to those who care about sustainable seafood, and a slap in the face to ICCAT's own survival - if there's no more fish, there's no more fish to manage."

The latest science shows that Atlantic bluefin tuna's spawning population has declined to below 15 per cent of pre-fishing levels – and may even have dropped to under 10 per cent.

Meeting just a year ago, ICCAT's members ritually tossed overboard the advice of their own scientists and did not even put the fishing closure supported by its own review on the agenda. The tuna commission astonished the world with a scheme for continued overfishing that it labelled a recovery plan but that WWF named a "collapse plan". In response, increasing numbers of global retailers, restaurants, chefs and consumers are stopping buying, selling, serving and eating this endangered species.