

## Bluefin Tuna: On the Verge of Collapse...Or Not?

by [Naturally Savvy](#) on 11.13.09



Scientists don't quite agree on whether bluefin tuna, pictured above, is on the verge of collapse. Photo by Jose Cort courtesy of the [NOAA](#).

Bluefin tuna is on the verge of **total collapse**. Maybe. It depends on who you ask. We may have been talking about **bluefin tuna** shortages for years, but many scientists and conservation bodies are now sounding panicked.

This week, the [International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas](#) (ICCAT) is meeting in Brazil to review population and fishing data, and set quota recommendations for the coming year.

In 2008, bluefin tuna catches were three times the limit recommended by the ICCAT, [New Scientist reported](#) -- and some scientists say the limits set aren't even sustainable.

### Controlling Overfishing

The problem is not overfishing off North America's coast, where quotas are kept low and strictly controlled, but excessive quotas and illegal catches in the Mediterranean.

Officials from the United States are gambling on the threat of listing bluefin tuna as an endangered species, which would restrict international trade, the [Cape Cod Times reported](#) yesterday.

It's a gamble that could have consequences for North American fishers, most of whom export their catch to Japan, where bluefin **tuna** is much-desired in **sushi**. If bluefin tuna were to be classified as endangered, U.S. markets would be flooded with tuna, causing the price of the fish -- and the profits for fishers -- to plummet.

Nevertheless, it's worth the threat says Andy Baler, owner of a fishing company, a bluefin exporter, and an advisor to the ICCAT:

There is real optimism there. If you're a company in the Mediterranean ... and you know you wouldn't be able to export anything to Japan, which is 70 percent of your market, you'd do something.

Of course, some fishermen worry that it's a risky gamble.

### Is Bluefin Tuna On the Verge of Collapse?

The future of bluefin tuna is in question, but just how dire the situation is varies greatly depending on who you're talking to.

Dan Pauly, a researcher at the University of British Columbia in Canada, told *New Scientist*:

It's like the year before the collapse of the northern cod.

If you've ever visited Newfoundland, you'd know how devastating the cod collapse has been. It's impoverished entire communities, and the cod stocks that bottomed out in 1992 have never recovered.

While scientists in Europe and Canada are sounding the alarm about a bluefin tuna collapse, the [U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#) (NOAA) doesn't think the situation is quite that critical.

Collapse isn't an issue says Molly Lutcavage, a professor at the University of New Hampshire and a scientist specializing in bluefin tuna:

I don't see any evidence of biological extinction anywhere.

Nevertheless, the NOAA has sent 40 delegates to the ICCAT meeting -- more than ever before. So there must be cause for alarm.

### More on Bluefin Tuna

[Atlantic Bluefin Tuna Ban Supported by Fishing Commission Scientists' Data](#)  
[Britain to Support Ban on Blue Fin Tuna](#)

