

A Ban On Bluefin Just Might Do The Trick

Bradford Plumer March 4, 2010 | 1:50 pm

For some time now, it's seemed likely that the Atlantic bluefin tuna would go extinct in the next few years. The popular sushi staple has been drastically overfished, its stocks have collapsed, and recent attempts to set global quotas on annual catches were **half-hearted and inadequate**. It's been a bleak scene all around. But now marine biologist Carl Safina **brings word** that there's one last attempt to save the tuna—a ban on international trade. And here's why it just might work:

Because bluefin tuna fishing worldwide is driven by prices paid in Japan, where individual fish have sold wholesale for up to \$175,000, every population is depleted. ...

Even if international trade is banned, bluefin tuna could still be caught and sold within any given country. But the fish are now sufficiently scarce that without Japan's prices, many boats would turn unprofitable and give up. The fish could recover, and a more sustainable fishery develop.



The United States has supported a ban, while Japan isn't too keen on the idea. Which means a lot will depend on whether the EU countries vote as a bloc and decide to support the ban. (They've been noncommittal so far.)

It's sort of remarkable: A few decades ago, the idea that *any* of these countries could support a ban would have been unthinkable—there's just too much money at stake for the fishing industry, and the lobbying pressure can be intense. (Indeed, fisheries easily squelched this proposal when it first surfaced in 1992.) But recently, there's been much more attention paid to the fact that fish stocks all over the world are collapsing and it's an unsustainable disaster—read Daniel Pauly's **recent mag piece** in TNR for a great overview—and attitudes do seem to be shifting.

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