



for a living planet



The fishing season ends for another year, and as what remains of the threatened bluefin tuna stock continues its amazing migrations, *the question now is – will it survive?*

- In July 2007, WWF began the Bluefin Witness series to monitor events unfolding in the Mediterranean.
- In the absence of any effective monitoring by ICCAT or its contracting parties, the WWF Bluefin Witness series drew on testimonies and other sources of information – ranging from fishermen to restaurateurs, media to field contacts, scientists to tuna farmers – to track the fate of Mediterranean bluefin tuna. These are the extracts.

SEASON OF SHAME

In 2007 the fleets aimed to take as much as they could, for as long as they could and, in some cases, by any means necessary.

France was particularly in the media spotlight, following indications of overfishing and misreporting by its fleets. Maritime affairs weekly 'Le Marin' announced that France was facing three separate enquiries into its alleged fraudulent activity in the Mediterranean bluefin tuna fishery. The enquiries focus on allegations of surpassed quotas, use of false names, and laundering of catches.

'Agence France-Presse' also claimed that French, Italian, Tunisian and Turkish fleets had re-flagged to Libya to exploit the last remaining breeding grounds for bluefin in the Mediterranean – the Gulf of Syrte in Libya.

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Meanwhile, despite being informed of the high levels of illegal and uncontrolled fishing occurring during the 2007 season, Japanese traders – like Mitsubishi



which accounts for some 40 per cent of Mediterranean bluefin imports to Japan – choose to

continue benefiting from the bluefin stock's mismanagement, importing what they can, when they can.

Signs of collapse

It is classically, though paradoxically the case that catches of a species peak in the period just before the stock collapses. Often the geographical range of the species strongly contracts and fishing activity intensifies in the very last remaining areas. This gives fishermen a false sense of fish abundance, only to find that the fishery will likely then decline abruptly and suddenly.

As a stock becomes overfished resulting in increased scarcity, the trade price of the species will typically increase as demand outstrips supply. By the second week of June, still within the fishing season, the Japanese media were already reporting a rise in the per-kilo price of tuna transferred to the Mediterranean farms and were predicting that it would continue rising to an estimated 6 to 6.5 Euros per kilo.

The prices fetched by trappers also rose by an estimated 25 per cent on the previous year and the sell-on price by farmers was expected to be 4200 to 4300 Japanese Yen per kilo – 1000 to 1500 yen higher than last year.

Professor Callum Roberts of York University and author of *The Unnatural History of the Sea*

There are a great many factors which come into play and simply stopping fishing will not guarantee that the stock can recover. If you take a stock below its ability to recover, alter its habitat or indirectly cause the ecosystem to change by depleting the fish stock in the first place, the likelihood of recovery appears to be slim."

VOICES OF CONCERN

**Caroline Bennett,
Managing Director Moshi Moshi**

(removed bluefin tuna from the menu of her UK sushi restaurants in response to concerns about the stock)

"I think that there is an over-expectation of what nature can provide. This is what worries me most about the situation. We can't afford to obliterate species at the rate that we are with such irreverence."

**Nedim Anbar,
President Turkish Tuna Farms Association**



"The fishing effort has remained high again this year but the weather has been very bad. Half the season was stormy and the fleets were forced back to port, I think they would have taken much more if they

could. Since ICCAT won't take care of bluefin, maybe God will do the job!"

Jose Luis Cort, ICCAT Scientific Advisor

"Now we are at risk of losing the Mediterranean nursery (for bluefin) and the consequences of that cannot be undone."

Dr Sergi Tudela, Head of Fisheries at WWF Mediterranean

"This year we have seen it all – fishing during the closed season, use of illegal spotting planes, massive over-quota catches, an international web of fraud to conceal the overfishing, fish laundering – the stock does not stand

Diego Crespo, Traditional Tuna Trap Fisherman, Spain

In the past, the bluefin tuna fishing season started in mid-April with the catching of chatos (beauties) which weighed upwards of 200kg. None of us have seen any chatos for a decade or more. We are very worried about our livelihoods but also about the survival of an amazing species, and the carrying forward of an ancient tradition. Could this all be destroyed thanks to 10 years of overfishing? The situation is immoral.



a chance under this onslaught and the failure of ICCAT contracting parties to implement the adopted management plan renders it devoid of content and of any meaningful conservation impact. The situation could not be more serious."

Richard Ellis, Ocean Historian and Author of Tuna: A Love Story

"Bluefin deserve to be understood as something more than just a commodity and too important to be driven to extinction. It's a horrible, horrible fate to be eaten out of existence."



WHAT NOW ICCAT?

WWF is calling on ICCAT to impose a moratorium of at least three years on the Mediterranean and East Atlantic bluefin tuna fishery. Only a multiyear closure of the fishery will give the ravaged stock any chance to initiate recovery.

When the process of recovery has begun, and the structural governance problems currently hampering sound management have been addressed – only then will WWF advocate the establishment of strict measures to ensure sustainable management. For a healthy Mediterranean bluefin tuna fishery in years to come.

“At this point and faced with this crisis, there is no alternative but a total closure of the fishery for at least three years to allow some semblance of stock rebuilding. Then and only then can we think of reopening with a strict recovery plan set along the lines of scientific advice.”

Dr Sergi Tudela, WWF

www.panda.org/tuna/witness

WWF is one of the world's largest and most experienced independent conservation organizations, with almost 5 million supporters and a global network active in more than 100 countries.

WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by:

- conserving the world's biological diversity
- ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable
- promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption.

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