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OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA



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ICCAT STATEMENT BLUEFIN TUNA
IN CITES COP15 DOHA 18 MARCH 2010

The attached document has been submitted by the Secretariat at the request of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas*.

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ICCAT Statement Bluefin Tuna in CITES CoP15 Doha 18 March 2010

By Fabio Hazin Chairman of the Commission

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentleman,
Honorable delegates,

As the Chairman of ICCAT- the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas, let me first thank you for inviting our organization to participate in such an important conference, and the State of Qatar, for hosting it. Let me also make it clear that I have no mandate to represent the views of ICCAT on the Monaco proposal. The sole purpose of my intervention, therefore, is to explain and to clarify the measures ICCAT has so far adopted to ensure the conservation of the bluefin tuna stocks in the Atlantic Ocean.

ICCAT was created over 40 years ago to manage the fisheries for tuna and tuna-like species in the Atlantic Ocean, with the objective of keeping their populations at a level capable of providing Maximum Sustainable Yield. In order to achieve this goal, ICCAT has adopted several conservation and management measures which include the implementation of total allowable catches and quota allocation, size limits, closed fishing seasons and areas, as well as trade sanctions, in particular to combat illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing.

All conservation and management measures adopted by ICCAT stem from the recommendations by its Standing Committee on Research and Statistics, which is composed by over a 100 of the best fisheries scientists in the world, from the contracting parties and other organizations, including those involved in other tuna RFMOs.

Among all species managed by ICCAT, bluefin tuna has certainly been one of those which has deserved a great deal of attention by the Commission. Although the first measures adopted by ICCAT to conserve the blue fin tuna stocks in the Atlantic Ocean date back to the early eighties, it was only in more recent years that the increasing fishing pressure, stemming mainly from farming and fattening operations which started in the mid-1990s, in the Mediterranean Sea, prompted the Commission to adopt and implement more comprehensive management plans to ensure sustainability of the exploited bluefin tuna stocks, such as the *Recommendation Concerning a Multi-year Conservation and Management Plan for Bluefin Tuna in the East Atlantic and Mediterranean*, adopted in 2002.

Following concerns expressed by ICCAT Scientific Committee, in 2006, about the decline in stock size as a result of increasing catches, the Commission adopted a rebuilding plan for the *Bluefin Tuna in the Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean*, aimed at rebuilding the stock by 2023. That plan included several measures such as minimum catch size and shortening of the fishing season. At the initial year of implementation, however, the Total Allowable Catch was exceeded due to the overshooting of the quotas by some contracting parties, which were then sanctioned, along with the adoption, in 2007, of a pay-back plan for the over-harvest. In that same year, a Catch Documentation Scheme was adopted and the fishing vessels over 24 m were obliged to be equipped with a Vessel Monitoring System.

Following a new review at the 2008 Commission meeting, the rebuilding plan was considerably strengthened through additional monitoring and control measures, including the adoption of an independent international observer program and a reduction of the Total Allowable Catch by 20%. In spite of that, however, the Total Allowable Catch adopted that year, was not in line with scientific advice, a situation that was, nevertheless, rectified last year.

In November 2009, about 4 months ago, the Commission agreed to significantly strengthen the measures aimed at ensuring the conservation of the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean bluefin tuna which will be implemented in this year fishing season and which are expected to accelerate the rebuilding of the stock to levels that can produce maximum catches at sustainable levels. These measures include:

- A lower total allowable catch of 13,500 tons in 2010, in line with the recommendations of the Commission's scientific committee, which has a probability over 80% that the stock will either improve or remain stable, over the next decade;
- A TAC for 2011 on, that will allow the stock to rebuild by 2022, with 60% probability, in full conformity with the advice expected from the scientific committee, on the basis of the stock assessment to be carried out in

September. It should be noted that because of the Catch Documentation Scheme, the quality and quantity of the data available to this next assessment will be improved;

- An immediate suspension of the bluefin tuna fishery, in case the stock assessment detects a serious threat of stock collapse;
- Further reductions in fishing capacity;
- A limit on the number of joint fishing operations that can be carried out;
- An observer program with 100% coverage of purse seine and farming activities;
- Reporting of catches close to real-time, allowing for close monitoring of quota consumption;
- A penalty schedule for members who do not comply with these management measures.

In 2009, ICCAT's Compliance Committee also adopted a new way of working, to carry out a review of all obligations of the Contracting Parties, one by one. As a result, a number of Contracting Parties were formally identified opening the possibility of the imposition of sanctions, this year, in case the non-compliance issues that have been detected are not rectified.

Mr. Chairman, following the decision by the Commission taken in 2009, the ICCAT Compliance Committee met again last February, to review the implementation of the multi-annual management plan for eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean bluefin tuna.

Based on the detailed review performed, it can be concluded that the Bluefin Tuna Catch Documentation scheme has worked effectively in 2009, with the importation of over 2,300 tons of bluefin tuna being refused by customs and over 800 t of caged bluefin being released back to the sea, on the grounds that the Catch Documents had not been issued in strict accordance with the requirements of the scheme.

The fishing capacity plans, which had been adopted by the Commission at its meeting last November, were also reviewed in light of the reduced TAC, with the Committee noting with satisfaction that all Contracting Parties had met the target of reducing over-capacity by 25%, with some of them even exceeding this level of reduction by a large margin.

Additionally, a Compliance Task Force was created to better track issues of non-compliance, not only in the bluefin tuna but in all fisheries managed by ICCAT, including the establishment of a penalty scheme for future infractions. The construction of a new set of Port State Measures, in line with the Agreement recently adopted by FAO was also discussed, in detail, with great progress.

I hope these measures, Mr. Chairman, have clearly shown that ICCAT is fully committed to the conservation of tuna and tuna like species under its mandate, as well as to a zero tolerance of non-compliance, particularly in the case of species requiring strict management control, such as the bluefin tuna.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, Contracting Parties and other partners have embarked upon a \$20 million research program on bluefin tuna, expected to span 6 years as a step toward improving ICCAT's science based management approach for Blue Fin Tuna. If any further clarification is needed, myself, as well as Dr. Gerry Scott, the Chairman of the Scientific Committee, and Dr. Driss Meski, the ICCAT Executive Secretary, who are also attending this Meeting on behalf of ICCAT, will be more than pleased to provide.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.