

# Japan big winner at UN conservation meeting

March 25 2010, By MICHAEL CASEY , AP Environmental Writer

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In this March 19, 2010 file photo, commuters pass by a popular tuna restaurant outside Tsukiji Wholesale Market in Tokyo. Dozens of Japanese government officials worked the floor the past two weeks ahead of key votes at the U.N. wildlife trade meeting which wraps up Thursday, March 25, 2010, in Doha, Qatar. The sign on right top reads "Highest quality bluefin tuna, Tskiji Sushi Number One." (AP Photo/David Guttenfelder)

(AP) -- The Japanese seemed to be everywhere at the U.N. wildlife trade meeting.

Dozens of government officials worked the floor the past two weeks ahead of key votes, offering guidance to confused but supportive delegates. They held a reception for select representatives at their embassy in Qatar, offering up [Atlantic bluefin tuna](#) sushi - a typical food served at Japanese formal occasions - the night before the vote on the export ban of the overfished species.

Their aggressive and relentless lobbying campaign appeared to pay dividends.

Japan came out the big winner at the 175-nation Convention on International Trade in [Endangered Species](#), or CITES, which wraps up Thursday, successfully defeating the proposed bluefin ban, voting down efforts to regulate the coral trade and joining other Asian nations to prevent several shark species used in the fin trade from gaining protection.

For some activists, the Japanese tactics were proof that CITES has been transformed from a clubby, conservation body to one driven by big money, trade and economics. The meeting is becoming more like U.N. [climate change](#) meetings, they said, where politics at times trumps science and a deals are struck by world leaders behind closed doors.

"Japan clearly mobilized massive efforts to keep fisheries out of CITES," said Mark W. Roberts, senior counsel and policy adviser for the watchdog group Environmental Investigation Agency.

It's not that the Japanese were the only ones to stake out a position, but they were more organized and persistent, delegates said, than the divided European Union and the United States, which didn't announce its position on the tuna ban until late in the game.

Japan launched its global campaign months ago, repeatedly meeting with governments big and small. And when it came to the conference in Qatar, they sent a 30-strong delegation that was stacked with fisheries people who have years of experience covering CITES.

The Japanese insist they were just one of many delegations searching for votes. But they were also under intense pressure at home to defeat the proposed ban on Atlantic bluefin tuna, given it could devastate the

country's fisheries industry since it imports 80 percent of the fish.

Hisashi Endo, the director of the Ecosystem and Conservation Office in the Fisheries Agency of Japan, said delegates stuck to the facts. They argued that regional fisheries bodies were better suited to regulate marine species and that the CITES ban was unfair. They also argued that the ban proposed by Monaco would penalize the Japanese sushi industry, while allowing American and European fisheries to keep catching Atlantic bluefin.

"We are not pressuring anyone," Endo said. "We are talking to many countries and expressing our opinion and seeking their understanding."

But some delegates accused Japan of using tactics that went beyond diplomacy and violated the spirit of CITES.

Kenya, which fought the Japanese over tuna and a proposed sale of Zambian and Tanzanian ivory stocks, accused Tokyo of pressuring delegates to support its positions and paying fisheries officials from unnamed African countries to attend the conference - something the Japanese repeatedly denied.

"The way we have seen this conference operate, there is a lot of influence that is quite unnecessary," said Patrick Omondi, a member of Kenya's delegation. "That is not very good for species that are affected by trade."

Javier Rosero, a member of the Ecuadorean delegation that supported most of the marine listings, acknowledged the Japanese played hardball, but argued the United States and others could learn a thing or two from them.

He said the Americans were often too slow to react and were not

forceful enough when they did. And in meetings with Ecuadorean officials, Rosero said the Americans didn't bring anything to offer to the table.

"I have been talking to Japan and they say, 'What do you need? What kind of project are you able to do?'" Rosero said. "The Japanese come to make business and the States come to explain."

Masanori Miyahara, chief counselor of the Fisheries Agency of Japan, acknowledged the government has funds that were aimed at helping developing countries build their fishing capacity. He said the funds were used by nations to attend CITES and other fisheries conferences - though he did not say how much or which countries benefited from the funds.

"Participation is very important for them to learn what is going on internationally," Miyahara said. "They use the money for tuna regional fisheries management meeting and other meetings. CITES is one of them."

But he denied his government "was buying votes" with such funding or its offers of bluefin tuna at its reception.

"We wanted to show what it is," Miyahara said of the tuna sushi served at the reception. "You can't buy the vote by just serving bluefin tuna. That's a silly idea."

**More information:** CITES: <http://www.cites.org/>

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