

# Overfishing pushes tuna stocks to the brink: experts

September 8 2012

---



Indonesia workers load tuna from a fishing boat onto a truck at Benoa fishing port in Denpasar in July 2012. Global tuna stocks are fast reaching the limits of fishing sustainability, decimated by an absence of comprehensive, science-based catch limits, conservation experts warned Saturday.

Global tuna stocks are fast reaching the limits of fishing sustainability, decimated by an absence of comprehensive, science-based catch limits, conservation experts warned Saturday.

Five of the world's eight tuna [species](#) are already classified as threatened or nearly threatened with extinction, according to the Red List of Threatened Species compiled by the International Union for [Conservation of Nature](#) (IUCN).

At the IUCN's World Conservation Congress currently underway in

South Korea's southern Jeju Island, experts said partial quotas currently in place were inadequate and uninformed.

"The problem is, there is lack of science-based catch limits to ensure effective management and conservation," said Amanda Nickson, Director of Global Tuna Conservation at the Pew [Environment Group](#).

The five Regional [Fisheries Management](#) Organisations (RFMOs) that manage the global tuna [fishing industry](#) do have some measures in place, including restricting the catch of certain species to the amount caught in a previously defined year.

They also operate "input controls" that, among other things, limit the number of fishing vessels, but Nickson argued these were ineffective as they simply provided an incentive to develop more effective fishing methods.

While acknowledging that scientific data on [tuna stocks](#) was "imperfect", Nickson said the UN [Fish Stocks](#) Agreement specifically provided for the setting of catch limits if the evidence in favour was compelling enough.

"There is sufficient science available to set precautionary limits," Nickson said.

"If we wait five, 10 years for the science to be perfect, in the case of some species we may not have anything left to manage," she added.

The Atlantic bluefin species, which can live to 40 years old and grow to more than four metres (13 feet) long, is in the gravest danger of disappearing with stocks estimated in some areas to have halved over four decades.

It is so highly prized by sushi-loving Japanese that a 269-kilogram (592-pound) fish went for a record 56.49 million yen (\$737,000 at the time) in January auctions.

"The message is that some tuna species are in bad shape," said Bruce Collette, chair of the IUCN Tuna and Billfish Specialist Group.

"Long living and high value tunas are threatened by over exploitation and under regulation by the regional agencies," Collette warned.

The global tuna industry is an economic juggernaut, with fishing in the Pacific Ocean alone—accounting for 65 percent of the global commercial catch—worth around \$5.5 billion a year.

Toshio Katsukawa, a fisheries expert from Mie University in Japan, said only urgent international cooperation could safeguard the future of the Pacific bluefin [tuna](#).

"Immediate action is necessary" because the risk of commercial extinction is immediate, Katsukawa said.

(c) 2012 AFP

Citation: Overfishing pushes tuna stocks to the brink: experts (2012, September 8) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-09-overfishing-tuna-stocks-brink-experts.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.