

Atlantic bluefin tuna quota to rise slightly

November 19 2012, by Celine Serrat



A chef displays a block of fat meat tuna from a 269kg bluefin tuna at Sushi-Zanmai restaurant near Tokyo's Tsukiji fish market. Annual catches of Atlantic bluefin tuna will rise slightly from next year, green groups said Monday at a meeting of countries that hunt the much-prized but threatened species.

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In 2013 and 2014, catches will rise to 13,500 tonnes annually for fish taken in the [Mediterranean](#) and east Atlantic compared with 12,900 tonnes at present, WWF said.

The new quotas were set by the 48-member International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) at the end of a week-long meeting in Morocco's port of Agadir.

The new catch limits were set in a context of conflicting news about a [species](#) listed by [conservationists](#) as endangered.

In 2006, ICCAT agreed to a 32,000-tonne annual catch limit but two years later set progressively tougher maxima as evidence mounted of a threat to stocks.

Last month, ICCAT scientists said they had found the first evidence of a bluefin revival, a finding that spurred hopes in some countries of an easing on catch constraints.

The current annual [quota](#) is 12,900 tonnes for the Mediterranean and east Atlantic and 1,750 tonnes for the west Atlantic—the goal being to encourage a complete [population recovery](#) by the end of this decade.

The catch total for the west Atlantic has been maintained for a period of one year, sources in Agadir said.

"It is encouraging that ICCAT listened to the recommendations of its own scientists and agreed to keep catch limits for bluefin tuna within their advice," said Susan Lieberman, director of international policy at the Pew [Environment Group](#).

Scientists had recommended keeping the quota between 12,900 and 13,500 tonnes.

"This decision will give this depleted species a fighting chance to continue on the path to recovery after decades of overfishing and [mismanagement](#)," said Lieberman.

"Although we are disappointed that the quota has only been set for one year in the western Atlantic and two years in the eastern Atlantic, we are hopeful that governments will expand their efforts to stop the illegal fishing and fraud in parts of this fishery."

The [Atlantic bluefin tuna](#) is on the endangered list of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Five of the world's eight tuna species are classified by the IUCN as threatened or near-threatened, a situation driven mainly by demand for sushi in Japan.

ICCAT is tasked with the conservation of 30 fish species in the Atlantic and Mediterranean.

Its members include Britain, Canada, China, Russia, the United States, several Mediterranean countries, the European Union and Japan, which single-handedly consumes over 75 percent of all the bluefin tuna caught, according to the WWF.

The Atlantic bluefin can live to 40 years and grow to more than four metres (13 feet) long.

The fish spawn just once a year and do not reach reproductive maturity until they are eight to 12 years old, making them more vulnerable to [overfishing](#) than smaller species which spawn more frequently.

Stocks are estimated to have halved over four decades in some areas, with catches in the 1990s exceeding 60,000 tonnes per year.

In a separate decision, ICCAT agreed to launch a process for recrafting its mandate to boost protection for sharks, Pew said.

If successful, ICCAT's new convention will explicitly include sharks, which at present are considered "bycatch", or an accidental catch which does not require detailed oversight.

"This action sets the stage for improved international shark fishing in the Atlantic, which is causing serious depletion of many shark species," said Lieberman.

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