

Atlantic tuna quotas unchanged for 2014

25 November 2013, by Stuart Graham



Large bluefin tunas are displayed before the first trading of the year at Tokyo's Tsukiji fish market on January 5, 2010

Annual fishing quotas for bluefin tuna in the East Atlantic and Mediterranean will remain unchanged in 2014, an international meeting on tuna fishing decided Monday, despite stiff opposition from Japan.

After marathon talks, a conference of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) concluded that the annual quotas would remain at 13,400 tonnes in the eastern Atlantic and 1,750 tonnes in the western Atlantic.

Sergi Tudela, the head of fisheries in the Mediterranean for the wildlife conservation group WWF, said while the meeting was underway that Japan and other "contracting parties" had pressed for quotas to be increased by 400 tonnes.

Japan is the world's biggest consumer of tuna, which is highly prized in sushi restaurants.

Some 80 percent of Atlantic [bluefin tuna](#) fished out of the Mediterranean ends up in the Japanese sushi market.

Stocks of bluefin tuna are thought to have fallen by at least 85 percent in the Mediterranean and eastern Atlantic, where they come to spawn in the warmer waters, since the start of the industrial fishing era.

Fish stocks now seem to have stabilised, which a new scientific count is expected to confirm in February.

The European Union, which in 2007 agreed to restrict bluefin tuna catches in the hopes of reviving dwindling stocks, was adamant in the meeting that the current quota be maintained.

ICCAT's decision went to "supporting the recovery of severely depleted Atlantic bluefin tuna," said Elizabeth Wilson, head of the international ocean policy unit for The Pew Charitable Trusts.

"The future of one of the ocean's most iconic and valuable fish—the Atlantic bluefin [tuna](#)—is brighter today."

South African government's fisheries expert Johann Augustyn, warned that countries that violate the quotas will from now on face stiff penalties.

"After this conference we have firm catch limits and those who break it will be penalised heavily," said Augustyn.

Conservation activists were disappointed however that the conference rejected several proposals to tighten a sharks finning ban.

"Unfortunately the governments... have failed to limit catches of porbeagle and shortfin mako sharks in the Atlantic Ocean, despite clear scientific advice that overfishing is depleting their populations," said Wilson.

Tudela added that the WWF was "very disappointed" at the member countries' decision to shoot down the proposals on the shark finning ban.

Sharks grow and reproduce slowly, yet an estimated 100 million sharks are slaughtered each year for their fins and meat.

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APA citation: Atlantic tuna quotas unchanged for 2014 (2013, November 25) retrieved 24 January 2022 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-11-atlantic-tuna-quotas-unchanged.html>

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