



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL

Brussels, 03 DEC. 2012
MARE/D2/NA/sfb 1429973

Subject: MED RAC advice on bluefin tuna

Dear Mr Kahoul,

The Commission would like to thank the MED RAC for their advice dated 17 October 2012 and their commitment to the sustainable management of bluefin tuna in the Mediterranean.

As you will know, discussions centred on bluefin tuna and the multi annual recovery plan during the recent ICCAT Annual meeting which took place in Agadir from 12-19 November 2013. Indeed, on the basis of this year's updated stock assessment and the review already foreseen in the current plan (Paragraph 6 of Recommendation [10-04]) ICCAT adopted new conservation and management measures and amended the multi annual recovery plan.

I would however like to refer to each of the items referred to in your advice. Regarding TAC, scientific advice was indeed strictly adhered to and the adopted figure of 13,400t for 2013 compensates the significant efforts undertaken by all stakeholders whilst making sure that the recovery of bluefin tuna is sustained and the goals of the plan are fully respected.

With regard to fleet capacity and your advice to avoid any further reductions in 2013, the existing ICCAT recommendation is very clear on this point and the EU was obliged to further reduce our fleet capacity to ensure the complete elimination of overcapacity by 2013. A fully compliant EU plan was submitted one month before the ICCAT annual meeting in accordance with paragraph 9 and 47 of Recommendation [10-04]. As you will fully appreciate, fleet over capacity was one of the main contributors leading to the initial decline of bluefin stocks and it is essential that the strict capacity reduction targets are fully respected by all ICCAT Contacting Parties including the EU.

Mr Mourad KAHOUL
President
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Regarding the dates for the purse seine fishing season, the EU supported a shifting of the authorised period from 26 May to 24 June in order to allow fishers to best utilise their quotas while fully respecting scientific advice.

Concerning bycatch, the Commission was not in favour of increasing the 5% current bycatch tolerance level. Indeed, the absence of specific scientific advice from the ICCAT Standing Committee for Research and Statistics (SCRS) on this issue did not provide us with any solid basis for doing so. We are also not aware of any issue from any EU Member State or other contracting party to increase this tolerance based on the concerns you mention.

The practise of "catch and release" is already foreseen within existing rules since sport and recreational fishers may only land one fish per trip. ICCAT has also reinforced bycatch measures and extended this to bluefin caught by other sectors, by stating that any bluefin caught in excess of the 5% bycatch tolerance must also be released.

Finally, with regard to the use of aircraft in the purse seine fishery, as you will know the lack of restrictions on aircraft together with the excess of fishing capacity has been the main contributor to overfishing in previous years and in particular 2007. We therefore felt that the reintroduction of aircraft would pose a threat to the recovery plan at a time when the signs are positive and hence threaten the efforts and achievements made to date.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lowri Evans', written in a cursive style.

Lowri Evans