

Atlantic Bluefin Tuna: This is Your Next Move

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November, 2014

Atlantic bluefin tuna are one of the most highly evolved and economically valuable fish in the Atlantic Ocean, and we are on track to losing them forever. We need immediate action to ensure that the fishery can be sustained for future generations.

Recommendations

1. Follow COSEWIC's recommendation and list the Atlantic bluefin tuna as endangered under Canada's Species at Risk Act (SARA).
2. Do not allow the total allowable catch for the Atlantic bluefin tuna to increase until we can be certain that the population can be sustained



What is the problem?

Decades of unsustainable overfishing and illegal fishing have put tremendous pressure on Atlantic bluefin tuna populations. Stocks are dwindling but demand remains high, driven by high-end sushi markets. A single fish can be sold for hundreds of thousands of dollars and the highest ever recorded price for a single fish was \$1.08 million (USD) in 2013.

In May of 2011, COSEWIC listed the Atlantic Bluefin tuna as endangered but it has not yet made it onto SARA.

Against scientific advice, ICCAT's 2014 meeting resulted in increased fishing quotas for the Atlantic bluefin tuna. There is evidence that the previous quotas had been helping the population recover but there is only a 50% chance that it will be able to continue on this trajectory given an increased total allowable catch.

Who are the players?

COSEWIC: The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. Designates which wildlife species are in some danger of disappearing from Canada. Established in 1977.

ICCAT: The International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna. An international, intergovernmental organization responsible for the conservation of tuna and tuna-like species. Established in 1969.

Without action, we will lose a top trophic level predator, who maintains balance in the marine environment, as well as an economically important fishery.

Learning From our Mistakes:

The Northern Cod Fishery



For 500 years the Atlantic Cod fishery shaped the lives and communities of Canada's Maritimes. But the stock was overexploited unsustainably and by the summer of 1992 it had dwindled to 1% of historic levels. At this point the Federal Government of Canada had no choice but to declare a moratorium on the cod. Otherwise there would be no chance of recovery. Said recovery has yet to occur.

Ecological uncertainty and a societal dependence on the cod fishery led to delays in political action while technological advances sped up the trajectory to tragedy. The devastating impact was widespread. Overnight over 35,000 fishermen lost their jobs.

Hindsight is 20/20 and looking to the past we have a chance to do it differently with the Atlantic bluefin tuna. There is still time to halt the stock collapse and save thousands of jobs globally.

Policy Implications

By accepting the Atlantic bluefin tuna as an endangered species and adding it to SARA, Canada will be making the statement that they acknowledge the issue of depleting stocks and wish to take steps to reverse the trend. This could encourage other nations to do the same.

Although there may initially be pushback, lowering the annual total allowable catch will ultimately be beneficial to fishers in the long run. It will ensure that the population can be sustained for future generations to profit from as well.



Conclusions

The nature of this issue is not new. Humans have been overfishing for as long as they've known how. The Atlantic Cod is a prime example, after a 14 year moratorium the population has still not rebounded. We have the opportunity to learn from our mistakes and save the Atlantic Bluefin Tuna as well as the livelihoods of the fishers who rely on it.

Acknowledging the distress calls of the Atlantic Bluefin tuna means listening to Canada's scientists and listing the species as endangered under SARA as well as lowering the total allowable global catch.



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