



PRESS RELEASE

Recreational Fishing Alliance

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For Immediate Release
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CENTER FOR BIOLOGICAL ABSURDITY SAYS “SHUT DOWN BLUEFIN!” Enviros Go From Lead Tackle To Tuna In Latest National Fishing Ban Attempt

Washington DC - The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has announced it will start an official review for Atlantic bluefin tuna under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The decision to consider an ESA listing for bluefin is in response to a request by the Center for Biological Diversity, the same group now spearheading a national lead ban for fishermen.

According to the Center for Biological Diversity, as a result of the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico where many of the bluefin tuna caught in the western Atlantic Ocean spawn, bluefin tuna will be endangered in the future, which they say warrants an official ESA listing. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which together with NMFS helps administer such rulings, ESA is defined as protecting endangered and threatened species and their habitats by prohibiting the “take” of listed animals, along with interstate or international trade.

Additionally, ESA defines ‘take’ as “to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect or attempt to engage in any such conduct.” Such a definitive listing would summarily eliminate the recreational catch and release fishery for Atlantic bluefin tuna, and could also impact other coastal fisheries where bluefin might be harassed, captured or harmed as a bycatch fishery.

Although news of an environmental organization trying to shut down another fishery has become fairly commonplace, the claim comes as a surprise to many recreational anglers who’ve seen large spreads of bluefin tuna up to 150 pounds from New England down through North Carolina in recent years. The New England charter boat industry has developed business for these fish because of their availability in inshore coastal waters during the summer, while a fairly robust fishery from New York to Virginia has existed for over a century, even though it’s also significantly restricted as a result of stringent regulations. Despite strong regulatory controls, the recreational bluefin fishery is still a significant one.

“Recreational fishermen have enjoyed bluefin tuna fishing for more than a hundred years,” said Jim Donofrio, Executive Director of the Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA). “Bluefin have for a long time been the common man’s big gamefish because they tend to be more accessible to near-shore areas than some of the tropical tunas such as yellowfin and bigeye,” Donofrio added.

Although landings are down significantly because of federal regulations, Donofrio said there are still enough recreational fishermen participating in the fishery to contribute significantly from an economic and social standpoint, in terms of tackle sales, fuel sales, boat dockage and maintenance, charters and recreational fishing activity and enjoyment. As such, RFA intends to aggressively involve itself in the ESA review and in assuring that the recreational fishing community is protected.

“Although regulations have significantly reduced harvest and have all but eliminated the party boat industry from this fishery, it is still an important component of the recreational sector,” Donofrio said, adding “if these fish are listed as endangered, which we do not believe they are, the recreational fishing industry will suffer another significant blow.”

Donofrio said there is a strong body of evidence that bluefin are not endangered, explaining that while abuses in the Eastern Atlantic by the European nations have decimated stocks in violation of international treaties, the countries that fish in the West have strictly adhered to conservation principles. “We cannot allow this environmental group and others who support its efforts to take advantage of the Gulf environmental crisis when there is no evidence that it has impacted the health of this stock,” he said.

In June, the RFA blasted the Center for Biological Diversity for using the Gulf tragedy to drum up national support for anti-fishing measures, noting that the real measures for addressing international overharvest of Atlantic bluefin should be through trade sanctions against offending nations. “The European Union (EU) has overfished their quotas for years, even subsidizing the expansion of their national bluefin tuna fleets,” said Donofrio. “The EU keeps overfishing the stock, the Japanese keep buying up the illegal harvest, and here in the United States a well-financed environmental movement is punishing our American anglers.”

RFA has openly lobbied for international trade sanctions against the EU for nearly a decade, and believes that if U.S. environmental groups were truly sincere about protecting bluefin tuna, they’d join the RFA in pressuring the Department of Commerce for increased compliance by foreign fleets instead of attacking American anglers.

“Too many people in the tackle and charter boat industry are talking about the phenomenal inshore bluefin fishery during the last few years which has really helped our East Coast anglers offset pretty significant losses suffered as a result of the overly stringent regulatory policies,” said RFA managing director Jim Hutchinson, Jr.

“If U.S. anglers believed that bluefin tuna were endangered, we’d support taking necessary steps to assure the health of the stock,” Hutchinson said. “We can’t, however, ignore the significant evidence provided by fishermen along the East coast that the stocks are not endangered,” he added.

Donofrio said the environmental activists responsible for this petition know full well that this action will have zero impact on international violators. “Just like their lead ban petition, they’re showing absolutely no concern for America’s fishermen or our coastal fishing communities,” Donofrio said, adding “an ESA listing will only punish law-abiding U.S. citizens and a uniquely American industry, it will do nothing to protect the bluefin fishery.”

“When government action, or proposal by an anti-fishing group, threatens the well-being of the recreational fishing communities, we will be there to aggressively fight it,” Donofrio added.

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The Recreational Fishing Alliance is a national, grassroots political action organization representing recreational fishermen and the recreational fishing industry on marine fisheries issues. RFA’s Mission is to safeguard the rights of saltwater anglers, protect marine, boat and tackle industry jobs, and ensure the long-term sustainability of our Nation’s saltwater fisheries. For more information, call 888-JOIN-RFA or visit www.joinrfa.org.