



PRESS RELEASE

Recreational Fishing Alliance

PO Box 3080, New Gretna, NJ 08224
P: 1-888-564-6732 F: 609-404-1968

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Contact: Jim Hutchinson, Jr.

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888 564-6732

CITES LISTING FOR BLUEFIN TUNA IS VOTED DOWN RFA SAYS U.S. BLUEFIN ANGLERS SHOULD BE PLEASED

Delegates at a United Nations conference on endangered species in Qatar this week soundly defeated a U.S. government proposal to ban the international trade of bluefin tuna. While there were many sportfishing and conservation groups who have helped promote the U.S. led proposal for a ban on the international sale of bluefin tuna, the Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA) is pleased with the decision.

“Most of the arguments from this side of the Atlantic were about how a commercial ban would not have an impact on the sportfishing industry or the quota, which was simply not accurate,” said Jim Donofrio, RFA’s Executive Director. Since recreational bluefin harvest quotas are determined by a percentage of the overall U.S. commercial quota, CITES listing would have turned the school, large school, and small medium fisheries into catch and release only fisheries and completely destroyed the recreational anglers’ opportunity to harvest western bluefin.

“Yes, we have a problem with the international community’s refusal to adhere to the committee’s past recommendations on quota, and the gross international overharvest during the past 10 years has contributed to the decline of Atlantic bluefin tuna,” Donofrio said, while noting that during this same 10-year period U.S. fishermen have complied with its country specific quota “sometimes to the disadvantage of our own fishermen.” The RFA’s point of view is that CITES listing on bluefin would be patently unfair to countries like the United States who have been fishing under the ICAAT recommended quotas.

“RFA believes that action to protect the bluefin tuna must be taken, but there’s a much greater chance that successful Atlantic bluefin rebuilding can be achieved if all international parties are forced to comply with annual harvest quotas recommended by the Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS),” Donofrio said.

In August, the RFA sent a letter to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) that noted that an international CITES listing would be excessive, particularly in a quota management system. The RFA instead recommended that international trade sanctions be used to curb the overharvest of bluefin quota by some members of the international community. “At considerable expense, the RFA first petitioned President George W. Bush on September 11, 2002 to take action against the European Union (EU) under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, as amended,” the letter noted, adding that some EU members are among the biggest violators of international recommendations.”

In the petition, the RFA noted that the actions of the EU continue to greatly undermine the biological objectives of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas or ICCAT. “These actions by certain EU fishing parties also result in serious and unfair economic injury to fishermen of the U.S. who are required to comply with programs designed to achieve the ICCAT mandate for sustainable fishing practices,” the letter said.

For the RFA and its tuna fishermen, the news that CITES listing for bluefin has been denied should not be considered bad news for saltwater sportsmen who are concerned about the future of bluefin.

“U.S. fishermen should not be punished for noncompliance to the ICCAT recommended quotas on Atlantic bluefin tuna harvest, but instead it’s a problem that ICCAT and the U.S. State Department need to deal with immediately,” Donofrio said.

“The EU needs to comply first by getting their harvest under control and Japan needs to stop buying bluefin from other ICCAT contracting parties that are caught outside any recommended quotas,” Donofrio said. “This will only happen when the U.S., Canada and other nations put forward a serious recommendation at ICCAT prohibiting ICCAT member Nations from buying fish that are caught out of compliance,” he said.

“The U.S State Department has been weak when dealing with this issue and they need to put a serious recommendation up to stop Japan from buying up all of these fish,” Donofrio noted.

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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.
The RFA 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.*