

Brussels, 17 November 2008

Fisheries: ICCAT meeting is “make-or-break” for bluefin tuna

Today sees the opening of the 16th Annual Meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) in Marrakech, Morocco. Key issues on the table for the EU are how to accelerate the recovery of the Eastern bluefin tuna stock by strengthening the multi-annual plan agreed in 2006, and the organisation’s record on compliance.

The October Council of Fisheries Ministers, under the guidance of the French presidency, has endorsed a bold and decisive mandate for the Commission to negotiate on their behalf at this year’s ICCAT meeting. European Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Joe Borg, said: “This year’s ICCAT meeting really is make-or-break for the bluefin tuna fishery. The recovery plan is a step in the right direction, but scientists tell us it has not gone far enough. The status quo is no longer an option. We need far more rigorous action, including real measures to bring capacity into line with the state of resources. Above all, we need to see ICCAT become an organization which honours its own commitments in practice. 2009 has to be ICCAT’s ‘Year of Compliance’.”

The 15-year recovery plan for Eastern bluefin tuna was adopted by ICCAT in 2006, including a far-reaching new system for control and monitoring of the fishery. The most recent report from ICCAT’s scientific committee shows that the plan has so far failed to have the effect anticipated, and that the fishery continues to be dogged by inadequate reporting of catches. The recovery plan is due to be reviewed by ICCAT this year. The EU will be seeking an ambitious revision of the recovery plan that can bring about decisive improvements of the condition of the stock without further delay.

ICCAT has also commissioned a performance review of its activities by an independent panel of fisheries managers and scientists. The panel’s report confirms the EU’s belief that ICCAT already has in place many of the instruments it needs for the sustainable management of the stocks under its care, and that the fundamental problem facing the organization is one of a failure of compliance. The EU will be arguing for ICCAT to take a much stronger line on compliance and enforcement in the future.

This year’s ICCAT meeting will run from today until Monday 24 November. ICCAT was created in 1966, and currently has 46 contracting parties.

For more details, see www.iccat.int.