

Brussels, 14 March 2008.

Commission launches major control campaign to clamp down on overfishing of bluefin tuna

The European Commission announced today the launch of a major EU control campaign aimed at preventing a repeat of last year's overfishing of Mediterranean bluefin tuna by a number of EU Member States. The launch of the Joint Deployment Plan (JDP), which will be coordinated by the Community Fisheries Control Agency (CFCA), marks the EU's determination to ensure that the fifteen-year recovery plan for the fishery, agreed within the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna (ICCAT) in November 2006, is fully respected ([IP/06/1632](#)). However, effective control measures will not suffice to ensure the sustainability of the fishery until the Member States concerned grasp the nettle and tackle the gross overcapacity of the fleet that targets bluefin tuna. As illustrated by a report published this week by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the whole fishery is plagued by overfishing by a fleet that keeps growing in size and efficiency both in the EU and in the other coastal states that target bluefin tuna.

Joe Borg, European Commissioner for Fisheries and Maritime Affairs, commented, "I welcome the cooperation of the Member States in organising the joint control effort. However, they need to go much further to tackle the root of the problem with courage and determination by ensuring the necessary scrapping of vessels till a sustainable balance is found between fishing capacity and fishing possibilities. Public funding is available under the European Fisheries Fund for vessel owners and crews affected by such scrapping. Financial support is also available to the fishing communities concerned to help them diversify their economies. The Commission will do all it can to help the Member States in their endeavour to return the fishery to ecological, economic and social sustainability."

Until such time as the fleet overcapacity has been reduced in line with the sustainable level of the resource, control and enforcement will continue to be a critical issue in the fishery. The Joint Deployment Plan announced today marks an unprecedented effort, in terms of both the scale of operations, and the technical means deployed.

The plan will bring together the resources of the seven main Member States involved in the fishery – Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal and Spain – and will cover all stages in the market chain, including controls at sea, onshore, and at fattening farms. A special Technical Joint Deployment Group (TJDG) will be set up in Brussels on 1 April 2008 to coordinate activities under the plan, and will remain in operation there until the end of the year. The ICCAT recovery plan includes a major new control scheme to address the issue of underreporting in the eastern bluefin fishery, which is the most radical and comprehensive scheme of its kind ever adopted by a Regional Fisheries Management Organisation.

In practical terms, the Community Fisheries Control Agency will coordinate joint inspection and control activities involving 13 large patrol vessels, 36 coastal patrol vessels and 16 aircraft. There will be 14 campaigns at sea involving in all 30 inspectors representing overall 160 patrol days. 25 joint inspections involving 50 inspectors are planned in the ports concerned. Commission inspectors will also be involved in 32 inspection visits both at sea and in ports.

The Commission has welcomed the report published by WWF. It shares WWF's analysis of the causes of the overfishing of bluefin tuna and its conclusions on the need to eliminate this overcapacity. WWF says that "fleet overcapacity in terms of number of vessels, as well as in terms of gross registered tonnage and total installed engine power, is by far greatest in Turkey, followed by Italy, Croatia and Libya." Furthermore, an economic analysis based on the minimum catches required to cover costs and generate minimum economic revenues shows strong overcapitalisation particularly in Turkey, Libya, Croatia and Italy.

WWF also says that "the current operational purse seine fishing fleet targeting bluefin tuna in the Mediterranean Sea from the 11 coastal states" ... "has a calculated yearly catch potential of 54,783 metric tonnes (Mt). This figure is almost double the annual total TAC set by ICCAT (28,500 Mt in 2008), and more than three and a half times the catch levels advised by scientists to avoid stock collapse (15,000 Mt), and does not yet take into account the catch potential of the rest of the BFT fleet (i.e. longliners, traps, bait boats, pelagic trawlers, hand line boats, etc.)."

Link to ICCAT: <http://www.iccat.int/>

Link to WWF report:

http://panda.org/about_wwf/where_we_work/europe/what_we_do/mediterranean/about/marine/bluefin_tuna/bluefin_tuna_news/index.cfm?uNewsID=126820