

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

November 18, 2010

Dr. Jane Lubchenco
Administrator
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Dr. Lubchenco:

As the International Commission on Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) begins its 17th Special Meeting in Paris, France, we wish to express our support for the U.S. delegation to that meeting, and to ask the delegation to do all in its power to address several key issues. Specifically, this year's meeting will require continued aggressive action on compliance with and enforcement of ICCAT policies, reliance on science to drive management decisions, and implementation of recommendations and actions that incentivize positive actions and one hundred percent compliance by member parties.

The Senate is currently considering a Resolution describing these issues and asking the U.S. delegation to ensure ICCAT holds to its commitment to the stipulations laid out in the Commission's Recommendation 09-06; to pursue stronger enforcement and compliance measures; and to strenuously defend U.S. quotas of all ICCAT managed species, including swordfish and bluefin tuna. In addition, we wish to request that the U.S. delegation pursue a modest, yet scientifically justifiable increase in the total allowable catch (TAC) of western Atlantic bluefin tuna from the current level of 1,800 metric tons (mt).

For years, the U.S. has led the world in conservation efforts of highly migratory species, and our actions have shown tremendous benefits to stocks like Atlantic swordfish, which is currently rebuilt and experiencing drastically lower levels of bycatch in the U.S. fishery. We are also beginning to see signs of similar success in the western Atlantic bluefin tuna stock. The most recent report by ICCAT's Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS) shows that under the traditionally used two-line recruitment scenario, the stock is already fully rebuilt. Under this scenario a TAC of 2000 mt would have a 92.6% probability of keeping the stock at the target level by 2019, and a TAC of 2250 mt would have an 86.2% probability. By comparison, the rebuilding parameters ICCAT last year agreed to impose for the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean bluefin stock included a TAC that had just a 60% chance of achieving the target level by 2023.

We certainly acknowledge that the SCRS report also offers an alternative, equally plausible "high" recruitment scenario that shows a far more pessimistic outlook than the two-line recruitment scenario. The uncertainty about which of these two scenarios is accurate tempers our optimism regarding the future of this fishery. Still, ICCAT's more than 30-year history of employing

the two-line recruitment scenario combined with the clear indications of stock growth shown in the most recent SCRS report gives us ample confidence that a modest increase in the TAC is warranted.

Furthermore, in the 2010 stock assessment the SCRS has provided policy-makers an opportunity to demonstrate to fishermen that when strict conservation measures result in scientifically-based estimates of positive rebuilding trends and show an increase in harvest is sustainable, they will be rewarded for their sacrifice.

Most pressing, we cannot state strongly enough that no transfer of quota should occur from U.S. fishermen to other nations. U.S. fishermen have led the world in measures to protect bluefin and unintended bycatch and have not exceeded their portion of the TAC since 2003, and have only done so twice since 1996. To transfer any U.S. quota to other nations that lack adequate protection for sea turtles and other marine populations would be simply untenable.

We thank you for your personal attention to this matter and we thank the entire U.S. delegation for its ongoing efforts to support our interests on this international stage.

Sincerely,

Olympia Snowe

Benny Frank

Kott P. Brown

Bill DeBlasi

Susan Collins

Chen Pui

Deanne Stakora

Michael H. Michael

Stephen Lynch

John F. Tierney