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RESPONSIBLE TUNA

Market pressure helped bring a tuna fishery back from the brink of collapse. Now WWF is working with scientists and tuna processors to make sure all tuna stocks are managed sustainably.

“Science demands a sharp reduction in the catch of bigeye tuna, but over the past decade this advice has been ignored,” warned Dr Simon Cripps, director of WWF’s International Marine Programme. “Once again the high seas are being fished out, and unless global intervention is effective, important fish stocks will be lost forever.”

Dr Cripps was speaking in 2007. The outlook was dire. Adult bigeye tuna are highly valued but instead fishing fleets were landing huge numbers of small fish. They weren’t worth much and the canneries didn’t really want them, but the cost to the species was immense, causing a more rapid and deeper decline in the bigeye stock.

In the Eastern Pacific, the situation was especially bleak. The half-measures adopted by the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC), the organisation in charge of managing fisheries in the region, had done nothing to arrest the decline. In fact, for the last two years there hadn’t been any conservation measures. A new approach was desperately needed.

INDUSTRY INTERVENTION

One of the key issues in maintaining healthy tuna stocks is a lack of effective management. To address this, in 2009 WWF got together with marine scientists and key players in the tuna processing industry to form the International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF). The ISSF advocates for effective regional management structures, and tuna fisheries move towards Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification. The MSC is the world’s leading certification and ecolabelling program for sustainable seafood.

The eight companies that were founding members, together controlled more than half the global canned tuna market. This gave the organisation considerable clout – which it used immediately. In April 2009 ISSF announced that its members would stop buying bigeye tuna from the eastern Pacific unless the IATTC agreed to science-based conservation measures that would allow the stock to recover. The IATTC quickly buckled under this concerted pressure. It finally agreed to

“A well-coordinated majority of the world’s tuna processors, joined with WWF, advocated for immediate conservation action, with the potential consequence that a majority of the world’s tuna processors would abandon transactions in bigeye from the eastern Pacific. That had never happened before.”

Susan Jackson
Director of ISSF

WWF TARGETS

- 2015** 25% of the canned tuna volume is produced to credible sustainability standards.
- 2020** At least 75% of tuna catches from stocks of all seven principle market tuna species (skipjack, yellowfin, bigeye, albacore, Atlantic bluefin, Pacific bluefin and southern bluefin tuna) worldwide are qualified for certification in accordance with credible sustainability standards.

PROGRESS

0.7% of global tuna is sustainably caught (July, 2011).

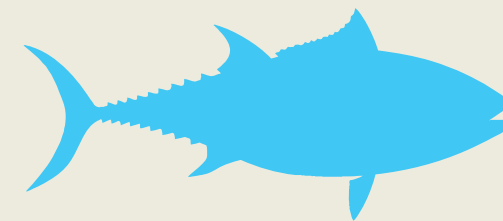
PRIORITY COUNTRIES

Production oceans

Indian Ocean and Western Pacific Ocean.

Markets

Japan, USA, European Union.



CONTEXT

Negative impacts

Tuna are subject to significant overfishing, with some stocks approaching collapse. Unsustainable by-catch of non-target species, many of which have high conservation and ecosystems value, including sea turtles, sharks and small cetaceans pose a major problem.

Opportunities

- Improved regional fisheries management: is critical to strengthening the governance of marine ecosystems.
- Poverty alleviation: transforming the economics of tuna fishing in the Indian and Pacific Oceans.
- Incentives for fishers: through the use of rights-based management and designing, financing and implementing international traceability systems that enhance the value of sustainable fishing practices.

TRENDS

Demand drivers

Income, consumption, globalization.

Geographic expansion

Expand tuna-conservation to an Ocean-wide approach moving beyond priority regions like Coastal East Africa (Indian Ocean) and Coral Triangle (Western Pacific). Ramping up engaging market actors at the all levels.

effective measures, including closing the purse seine fishery for two months a year, setting lowered quotas for longline fishing and setting aside a large area to reduce the catch of small bigeye.

“The measures weren’t perfect, but they reduced the bigeye catch in the eastern Pacific Ocean. This helped to allow the stock to recover from heavy fishing pressure,” says ISSF President Susan Jackson. Following IATTC’s prompt action, the ISSF took bigeye tuna off its “red list” – but it’s ready to intervene again if necessary. “The stock of bigeye is in better shape but it’s still not in great shape and will be monitored closely,” says Susan. “Any sign of a decline in stock health will lead to a review of the Foundation’s position.”

INCENTIVES FOR COOPERATION

ISSF is building on its success with eastern Pacific bigeye tuna in other areas. In particular, it’s campaigning for similarly effective conservation measures for bigeye, yellowfin and albacore tuna throughout the world’s oceans. It’s been effective in getting stocks properly assessed, including previously unassessed stocks such as Mediterranean albacore and Indian Ocean skipjack. ISSF is also fostering

collaboration among scientists and fishing crews to develop practical solutions for reducing bycatch – the unintentional catch of small tuna and other species.

The number of companies involved is growing too – at the time of writing, it stood at 15, making up almost three-quarters of the global market. All have made commitments to sourcing responsibly and supporting the development of more sustainable practices.

“Producers have a priority interest in sustaining the fisheries that sustain their way of life,” says Susan. “When producers join with scientists and conservationists to focus on evidence-based solutions, such a broad coalition of stakeholders can truly incentivize international cooperation and effective action. We’ve seen it happen.”

“Our main goal is simple – 100 per cent of global tuna stocks sustainably fished.”



The *International Seafood Sustainability Foundation* (ISSF) exists to undertake science-based initiatives for the long-term conservation and sustainable use of tuna stocks, reducing *bycatch* and promoting ecosystem health.

issf-foundation.org



The Marine Stewardship Council contributes to the health of the world’s oceans by recognizing and rewarding sustainable fishing practices.

msc.org

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