



Contact: Monica Allen  
301-713-2370

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**Statement from Rebecca Lent, U.S. Commissioner to  
the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas**  
*Subject: Closure of bluefin tuna fishery not enough to ensure future of resource*

“The European Commission recently closed the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean bluefin tuna fishery to purse seine fishing by European Union Member States—two weeks before the end of the regular fishing season. While the EC action was the right one, it highlights the EC’s continued inability to manage this fishery effectively—a management failure that has been exacerbated by extensive overcapacity in the EC purse seine fleet.

Stringent international monitoring and control measures adopted by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) in 2006 were supposed to address the pervasive reporting and compliance problems, but two years later fishery controls remain weak and overharvests continue. The total catch limit for this seriously overexploited stock is twice the level recommended by ICCAT’s own scientists to stop the stock’s decline. Actual harvests over the years have also overshoot even these excessive limits.

The United States called for a temporary suspension of the eastern fishery last year until effective controls could be implemented because of these concerns. Eastern harvesters were unwilling to support the U.S. proposal and compliance with current management measures is suspect again in 2008. In light of this, it is clear that the recent EC action, while appropriate, is not enough to ensure the future of this important resource.

This week, ICCAT scientists are meeting in Spain to assess the status of bluefin tuna. The United States is keenly interested in the results of that scientific analysis, but we are concerned that the assessment will show further decline of the eastern stock given ongoing problems with the management of the fishery. Whatever the outcome, the international community, and particularly the ICCAT members who fish for eastern Atlantic bluefin tuna, must be prepared at the annual ICCAT meeting in November to adopt and implement stringent conservation measures that begin the rebuilding process. To do otherwise risks the commercial extinction of this magnificent species.”

**Rebecca Lent, Ph.D.**, is director of International Affairs for NOAA’s Fisheries Service and head of the U.S. Delegation to the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas.

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