



The NCMC

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BLUES FOR THE BLUEFIN TUNA

I'm standing at the crossroads, believe I'm sinking down. – American bluesman Robert Johnson

“ICCAT is at a crossroads.” That’s what United States Commissioner Rebecca Lent told fellow members of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas in her opening statement at ICCAT’s annual gathering in November. Dr. Lent was referring to the intersection of two opposing forces: catches of bluefin tuna in the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean Sea that are the highest ever, and a population of bluefin that is the lowest on record. The commission’s scientific advisors warn it’s a collision course that could collapse the stock in a matter of years.

“But when all was said and done,” says National Coalition for Marine Conservation president Ken Hinman, who served as a member of the U.S. ICCAT delegation in Marrakech, Morocco, “the commission chose to keep moving recklessly down the same old path. As a result, ICCAT will continue to drive down stocks of bluefin tuna, chasing the decline with little hope of catching it before it crashes.”

STORMY MONDAY

The meeting began on Monday, November 17th with a “Report of the Independent Review.” Under pressure from its critics, ICCAT at the 2007 meeting appointed an outside panel of experts to evaluate its performance as measured against its stated objectives. Not surprisingly, the commission didn’t fare too well. With respect to conserving its marquee species, the bluefin tuna - in particular the

collapsing eastern Atlantic stock - the panel observed that ICCAT is widely viewed by the public as well as by many of its own members as “an international disgrace” and “a travesty in fisheries management.” The independent reviewers seemed to agree.

Panel convenor Glenn Hurry, whose day-job is CEO of the Australian Fisheries Management Authority and who also serves as chair of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, presented the report’s findings and didn’t pull any punches. Noting that ICCAT has the tools to monitor, enforce and manage its fisheries, “(it’s) been seriously letdown by it members,” he said, many of whom are unwilling to meet the most basic requirements of good stewardship, such as accurately reporting their catches and complying with regulations. “Stop trying to beat the system,” he scolded the captive and visibly uncomfortable audience. “It’s not a game. ICCAT is a legally binding obligation.”

The report highlights the fundamental need for regional fishery management organizations to accept and follow the best available science - in ICCAT’s case, the advice of its Standing Committee for Research and Statistics (SCRS) - something the commission has failed to do with regard to eastern bluefin. (The panel commends western countries for adhering to the science when setting catch limits, but more on that later.) Hurry *et al* went so far as to suggest suspending all fishing for bluefin in the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean until the nations fishing there gain control of their fisheries, agree to abide by international agreements and fully report their catches.

(Continued on page 3)





Commentary

IN THE TRENCHES

NCMC staff attended over 60 meetings in 2008. We participated in meetings of councils and commissions, science panels and advisory bodies, led workshops, spoke at Congressional hearings, sat down with NMFS officials, and held strategy sessions with other fishing and environmental groups.

Now let's face it, nobody likes meetings. They're a necessary evil. As Milton Berle once quipped, at meetings we keep minutes and lose hours. Going to meetings takes you away from work you could be doing and you always return with more.

But in fisheries management, meetings are often the public's only entrée into decisions that directly affect us. Government doesn't have a vision, only a process. For bureaucracies, it's been said, procedure is everything and outcomes are nothing. We have to be there to make sure the management process results in decisions that conserve fish and protect the future of fishing.

It's not enough to issue a statement before or after an action, to claim credit or complain. You've got to be there, in the trenches, working to influence decisions, which are usually the result of a long series of meetings. It's not glamorous work, it takes tireless commitment, and it goes largely unnoticed outside a small circle. But we can't win without it. Change does occur—our track record attests to that - but there's no escaping that we have to work hard for it.

CHANGE IS EVOLUTIONARY, NOT REVOLUTIONARY

A case in point. No organization has worked harder to protect the ocean's forage base. From sponsoring workshops to writing reports and issue papers, attending countless meetings and building alliances to draw other groups into the arena, NCMC has steadfastly occupied the forefront on this issue. (see "Celebrating Progress," p. 7)

We've devoted staff and resources to advocating at three regional councils and an interstate commission, as well as with the National Marine Fisheries Service. We had to start from scratch, building the case for change, opening the decision-making process to new information and new approaches, every step of the way laying the groundwork for putting **Forage First!** And change is coming, one step at a time:

- We got the first-ever limits on menhaden fishing and the first research plan to study its ecological role. Now we're developing a long-term ecosystems plan to protect that role.
- We helped form a Herring Alliance and closed near-shore waters to mid-water trawls. Now we're amending the New England herring plan to protect sea herring as forage and minimize bycatch of river herring.
- We persuaded NMFS to include more conservative standards for forage fish in its new National Guidelines for setting catch limits in all council plans in all regions.
- We helped develop broad support for a West Coast Action Plan for advocacy at the Pacific Council, where we will now work to put sardine, anchovy and squid under a true "forage first" plan.

Ken Hinman, *President*

NATIONAL COALITION FOR MARINE CONSERVATION

Founded in 1973

The NCMC is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to the following goals:

- ◆ preventing overfishing and restoring depleted fish populations to healthy levels
- ◆ promoting sustainable use policies that balance commercial, recreational and ecological values
- ◆ modifying or eliminating wasteful fishing practices
- ◆ improving our understanding of fish and their role in the marine environment
- ◆ preserving coastal habitat and water quality.

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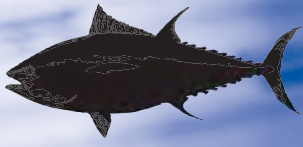
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BLUES FOR THE BLUEFIN TUNA

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DON'T BRING ME DOWN

In the months leading up to the ICCAT meeting, there was much talk of such a moratorium, but that was never going to happen. Realistically, the target to aim for could be no more ambitious than the SCRS recommendation that the eastern Atlantic bluefin catch be no higher than 15,000 tons in 2009 and that the Mediterranean be closed to fishing during spawning season, May through July. Knowing that anything less would further the bluefin's decline, the U.S. co-proposed (with Canada, Brazil and others) the adoption of both measures early in the week-long meeting. Alas, even asking the least was too much to ask.

ICCAT members from the eastern Atlantic - mainly the European Community and North Africa - signaled early on that they had no intention of bringing their total catch anywhere near the scientists' recommended level. They've built up enormous fishing capacity (1,750 authorized vessels), including a booming tuna ranching industry in the Mediterranean that's drastically increased demand for tuna to fatten for sale to the lucrative sushi and sashimi markets. In 2007, the SCRS estimated the eastern fleets caught 61,000 tons. That's more than double the total allowable catch (TAC) for that year (29,500 t) and more than double again the level scientists say is needed to end overfishing (8,500 - 15,000 t).

After a full week of tough negotiations, ICCAT reduced the eastern TAC beginning in 2009, but not by nearly enough. The commission accepted a 22,000 ton quota, which would be reduced further to 19,950 tons in 2010, when the status of the stock will be reviewed again. The Med spawning grounds were left open to purse seining in May and half of June, traditionally prime fishing months and peak spawning time. What eastern countries are claiming is a substantial cutback will do little to save the bluefin, according to the SCRS, and the stock will continue to decline from its already depleted condition (just 10 percent of an unfished population).

The agreed-to quota, in fact, will not go below 20,000 tons until 2011, because, adding insult to injury, ICCAT is allowing Libya, Morocco and Tunisia to add 674 tons of "underage" to their quotas in 2009 and 2010, which means fishermen will be landing at least 5,000 tons more than the

stock can sustain for the next two years. The very idea of underages in a fishery where under-reporting is rampant and total catches probably exceeded the quota by more than 100 percent is absurd, if not criminal.

HOT TUNA

Halting overfishing is hard enough. ICCAT has to deal with two kinds: legal and illegal. Legal overfishing occurs when TACs are set too high. That kind of overfishing will continue under the new eastern bluefin agreement. But what of illegal overfishing, which occurs when TACs aren't honored? IUU fishing - that is, illegal, unregulated and/or unreported - has been at least as big a cause of the bluefin's demise as ICCAT's failure to set science-based catch limits.

At the first Tokyo tuna auction of 2009, a 283-pound bluefin sold for \$103,616. With such astronomical prices being paid for the fatty flesh of bluefin, there is a huge incentive for lawlessness. Add to that the growing demand from tuna farms in the Med, which have a capacity to handle over 50,000 tons a year, and the temptation to ignore quotas and maximize profits is almost irresistible.

The 2008 ICCAT agreement contains over 20 pages of language meant to bring the illegal fishing under control, but it remains to be seen whether or not it will be enforced. After all, the 2006 agreement relied mostly on the implementation of new compliance measures, which looked good on paper but apparently had little or no effect on the water.

IT HURTS ME TOO

Although most of the focus and debate in Morocco was on the east because of the rapidly plummeting stock and continued overfishing, the western population is in dire straits, too. The difference is, the west took its plunge decades ago. The U.S. supported new, lower quotas based on the latest science, and the U.S., Canada and Japan agreed to reduce the western Atlantic quota from 2,100 tons to 1,900 tons in 2009 and 1,800 tons in 2010.

The problem is, science-based catch limits in the west, which have averaged around 2,000 tons a year since the early 1980s, have not contributed to rebuilding. In fact, even with under-harvests in recent years, the western spawning stock is about 10 percent smaller than it was in 1998, which puts it at only 18 percent of what it was before the first catch limits were put in place in the 1970s.

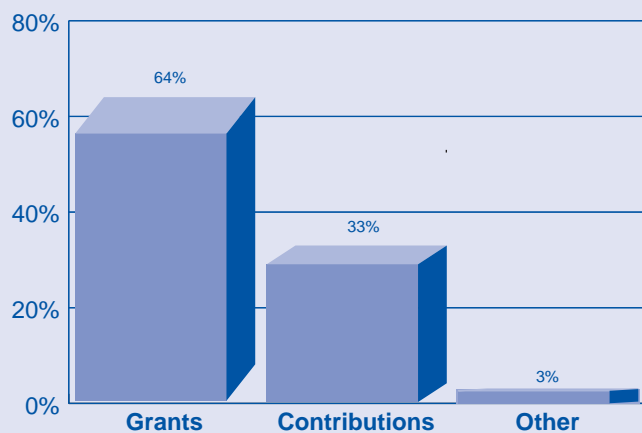
There is legitimate concern that overfishing in the east is hurting U.S. fisheries, as well as adding fishing mortality to the western stock when those fish venture to the other side of the Atlantic. Overfishing in the east began in earnest in the late 1990s, and there is probably a correlation between the skyrocketing fishing mortality on adult fish there and the sharp decline in the fishery for giant bluefin off New England that began a few years later.

But if the western fishery has relied on visiting eastern fish, the western stock - which is separate and distinct, originating only in the Gulf of Mexico - is impacted most by

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2008 FINANCIAL SUMMARY

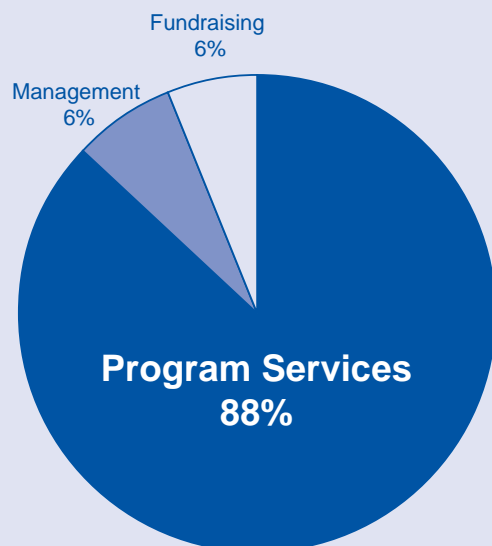
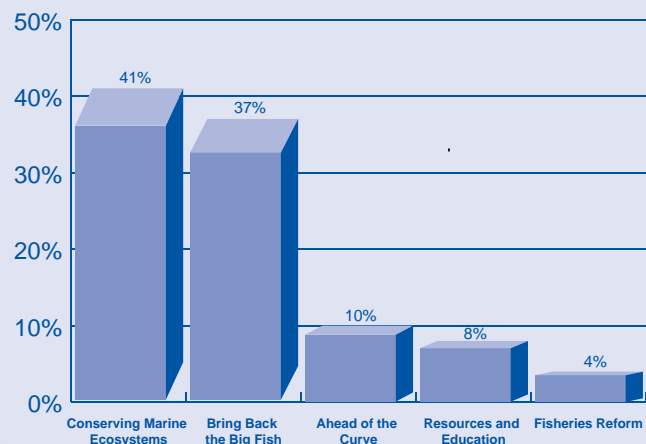
SOURCES OF REVENUE BY PERCENTAGE



Most of our financial support comes from private foundation grants and individual contributions such as those generated through our membership program.

Allocation of expenditures among our five marine conservation programs varies year-to-year, depending on changing needs and events. Members can choose to support a specific program with their annual gift.

PROGRAM EXPENDITURES BY PERCENTAGE



We work hard to stretch every dollar. **88%** of our expenditures directly support our conservation programs.

2008 OCEAN HONOR ROLL

We would like to express our gratitude to the following individuals and organizations for their generous support in 2008.

Grants

Keith Campbell Foundation for the Environment
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International Light Tackle Tournament Association
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BLUES FOR THE BLUEFIN TUNA (Continued from page 3)

fishing in the west. What those who contend that eastern overfishing has held back western recovery forget is that western bluefin declined and then stabilized at extremely low levels, despite abiding by ICCAT quotas, through the years 1982-1995; before fishing mortality in the east had even reached overfishing levels. What's happened since - no rebuilding - is just a continuation of what went before.

So these new limits in the west might not be enough, either. If the eastern bluefin will continue to decline because of ICCAT's inaction, albeit at a slower rate, it's just as likely the western stock will at best remain in its current depleted condition if more isn't done. Further domestic action on the part of the U.S., which has jurisdiction over the western stock's breeding ground in the Gulf of Mexico, is needed, now more than ever. The U.S. outlawed targeting bluefin in the Gulf of Mexico years ago, but hundreds of breeders are still being caught as longline bycatch every year. Conservationists have repeatedly called for a complete closure of the Gulf to longlining during spawning season, from April to June. (see "Helpless Giants," MB #118)

IT'S ALL OVER NOW

Where do we go from here? "I went to the 2008 meeting thinking it was the moment of truth," says NCMC's Hinman, "a decisive moment at which the future of bluefin tuna and ICCAT as a tuna management body were on the line. But I left Marrakech feeling like I'd

witnessed a different moment of truth - el momento de verdad, as used in the bull ring - the point at which the matador makes the kill. I'm convinced we have no choice now but to forsake ICCAT for the sake of the bluefin's survival. And that means CITES."

It's noteworthy that Japan strongly supported the 15,000 ton quota for the east, which would affect their fishermen and markets, too, based on their conviction that if ICCAT didn't go this low, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) would take over and end international trade. Before the ICCAT meeting, it was common knowledge that if the commission did not follow the science in 2008, the next step could be listing Atlantic bluefin tuna under Appendix 1 of CITES, which would close the global market that is driving bluefin to the brink of extinction. And that's where we are.

The chances of a CITES listing are good. Another listing effort failed in 1994, but much has changed: 1) then it was only the western stock that was depleted, but now the larger eastern stock is collapsing, too; 2) then only U.S.-based groups were up-in-arms, but now the major European NGOs - World Wildlife Fund and Greenpeace - are more outraged and more engaged in the plight of bluefin than anyone; and, 3) then it was the word of environmental and fishing critics against ICCAT's, but now there is an ICCAT-sanctioned independent performance review that calls its conservation of bluefin tuna an "international disgrace." In 2008, ICCAT had the opportunity to change that harsh assessment. But it failed - once again. □

SHARK ACT RE-INTRODUCED IN 111th CONGRESS

On January 6th, Rep. Madeleine Z. Bordallo (D-GU), Chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife and Oceans, introduced the Shark Conservation Act of 2009 (H.R. 81) in the House of Representatives. The bill is identical to the Shark Conservation Act of 2008 (H.R. 5741), which was passed last year by the U.S. House of Representatives but was not acted on in the Senate before the 110th Congress adjourned. The legislation would greatly strengthen the U.S. shark finning ban by requiring fins to be naturally attached to any shark landed by any vessel within the United States and its territories. Other countries must implement comparable regulations or face the possibility of U.S. sanctions.

NCMC needs your help to get this bill passed into law in the 111th Congress! Please take a moment to write to your Representative today. You can find your Representative and his/her contact information by entering your zip code on the United States House of Representatives web site, www.house.gov/.

Visit www.savethefish.org to view the sample letter.

WEST PALM BEACH FISHING CLUB RETIRES SHARK RECORDS

The West Palm Beach Fishing Club (WPBFC) located in West Palm Beach, Florida has taken action to eliminate all club activities that could put additional pressure on Atlantic coastal and pelagic sharks, many of which are severely overfished or their status is unknown. All shark categories have been retired from the club's All Time Club Record Book. Dr. Ray Waldner, an ichthyologist and WPBFC member, explains, "Sharks are particularly vulnerable to overexploitation as each female produces relatively few offspring; they apparently have high natural mortality rates, and they are slow to mature."

This is not the first time the WPBFC has retired fish from the club record book in the interest of conservation. In early 2002, the club retired all billfish species including sailfish, blue marlin and white marlin.

Conservation and education have been at the core of WPBFC activities since the club was founded in 1934. The club's long and impressive history is celebrated in a new book by Mike Rivkin, *The West Palm Beach Fishing Club: A 75-Year History*. Details are available on the club's web site, www.westpalmbeachfishingclub.org.

CELEBRATING PROGRESS: 2008 IN REVIEW

CONSERVING MARINE ECOSYSTEMS

Save the Stripers Campaign

Goal: Work with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) to better manage populations of Atlantic menhaden (the primary prey of striped bass), to address mounting concerns about the diminished role of menhaden as forage, on a Chesapeake Bay-wide as well as coast-wide basis.

2008 Achievement:

- We ushered through our recommendation to appoint a working group to develop ecological reference points - e.g., target population size, age structure, and set-aside for predators - by the completion of the 2009 stock assessment.

Forage First! Campaign

Goal: Reform fishery management plans for key prey species to explicitly account for predator/prey relationships and to prioritize the protection of these relationships over allocation to fisheries.

2008 Achievements:

- We influenced federal guidelines for setting catch limits, which call for protecting predator-prey interactions, with emphasis on "maintaining adequate forage for all components of the ecosystem."
- We argued for an Atlantic sea herring amendment objective to guide public comments, and ultimately management alternatives, to address the need to protect its ecological role as forage.
- We obtained alternatives to investigate and address at-sea bycatch of depleted river herring and American shad stocks in draft management plan amendments for these species. Plans will be finalized in 2009.
- We inspired the formation of and were selected to serve on a West Coast Forage Fish Steering Committee, which developed an Action Plan for ecosystem-based management of sardines, anchovies, Pacific hake, market squid and other forage species. (see "New Report Makes Recommendations for Ecosystem-based Management of West Coast Forage Species," p. 8)

BRING BACK THE BIG FISH

Our primary goals for the **Bring Back the Big Fish** program in 2008 were to:

- Save the western Atlantic bluefin tuna from possible extinction;
- Restore Atlantic shark populations by phasing-down the commercial fisheries;
- Protect billfish, sharks, tuna and dolphin from indiscriminate pelagic longlining by maintaining the U.S. no-longlining zones; and,
- Afford overfished Pacific marlin and sailfish the same protection as their Atlantic counterparts by launching a campaign to end the sale of all billfish in the United States.

2008 Achievements:

- We obtained the support of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) in giving special status to the Atlantic bluefin tuna's breeding habitat in the Gulf of Mexico.
- We achieved strong new shark conservation measures for severely depleted large coastal sharks in the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico, including a requirement that all sharks be landed with fins naturally attached.
- We rallied support for the Shark Conservation Act of 2008, which was passed by the House of Representatives.

2008 by the Numbers:

- * 60 meetings and hearings in 30 cities in 3 countries
- * 22 documents authored and submitted on proposed fishery management actions
- * 18 e-mail action alerts
- * 5 workshops

...advocating on behalf of 16 species of forage fish and over 80 big fish species in the Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and Pacific.

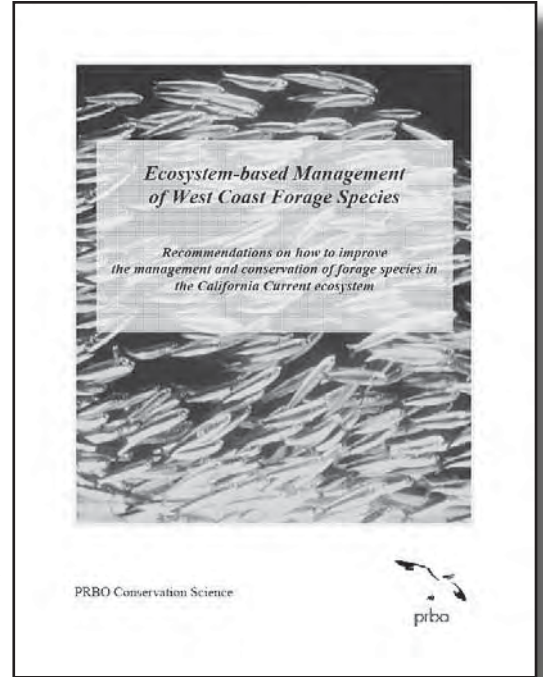
- We blocked a transship permit that would have allowed U.S. fishermen to sell juvenile Pacific bluefin tuna to Mexican tuna ranches.
- We persuaded NMFS to scale-down and tighten up an experimental swordfish longline fishery in the Atlantic to minimize risk to bycatch species which include marlin, sailfish, tunas, and sharks.
- We launched the **Take Marlin Off the Menu** campaign to end the commercial harvest, sale and importation of marlin, sailfish and spearfish in the United States. Through a new web site, press releases, editorials and other media, our message has reached over 9 million people!



NEW REPORT MAKES RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ECOSYSTEM-BASED MANAGEMENT OF WEST COAST FORAGE SPECIES

The California Current ecosystem, which runs along the West Coast of North America, exhibits a “wasp-waist” food web pattern, meaning that there are few species of forage fish (e.g., sardines, anchovies, market squid, mackerel, hake) to support a high diversity of top level predators. Commercially-important fisheries are in place for many of these forage species. To protect predator-prey interactions from fishing impacts, management strategies should prioritize the protection of a prey base for predators. Yet by and large, West Coast fisheries are managed using single-species approaches that do not account for the interdependencies of species within the food web.

To develop an action plan to advance ecosystem-based research and management of forage fish inhabiting the California Current ecosystem, Point Reyes Bird Observatory Conservation Science (PRBO) and the Marine Fish Conservation Network formed a West Coast Forage Fish Steering Committee comprised of federal and state agencies, scientists, fishermen, and environmental groups. NCMC Executive Director Pam Gromen was selected to fill one of the seats on the committee. Three steering committee meetings were held between July 2008 and November 2008. The action plan was completed in January 2009 and published as *Ecosystem-based Management of West Coast Forage Species: Recommendations on How to Improve the Management and Conservation of Forage Species in the California Current Ecosystem*. NCMC will work to implement the plan’s recommendations, which will provide information, tools, and policies necessary to sustain productive marine food webs and the wildlife and human communities that depend upon them. □



Your mailing label now includes your membership renewal date.



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