

PRESS RELEASE

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International Roundtable Calls for Improved Regional Management and Use of Market-Driven Incentives for Sustainable Tuna Production

23 April 2008 (BRUSSELS) The Sustainable Tuna Roundtable concluded on Monday in Brussels with agreement by participants that substantial improvements to regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs) are needed to ensure global sustainability of commercial tuna fisheries, including the health of tuna stocks and the ecosystem effects of tuna fisheries (e.g., bycatch of sensitive species and of juvenile and undersized tunas). Assessment, certification and eco-labeling programs were recognized as important market-based incentives to promote fisheries sustainability and to address worker conditions and product safety.

Tuna fishing companies recognize that the future of their businesses rely on the success of RFMOs. However, consensus-based decision-making has often prevented RFMOs from adopting measures that effectively curb the growth of tuna fleets, decrease fisheries-related tuna mortality and address bycatch. Low compliance with RFMO measures exacerbates the problem. **"Therefore, the Sustainable Tuna Roundtable participants agreed to increase seafood retailer and tuna fishing industry participation in RFMO activities in order to push for the adoption of legally binding measures that implement the recommendations of the RFMO scientific committees and ensure compliance to them,"** explained Kitty Simonds, Executive Director of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council.

Participants also agreed that assessments, certification and eco-labeling programs provide strong market-driven incentives for sustainable tuna production, as well as for addressing issues related to worker conditions and seafood safety and quality. Independent, third-party (in some cases, peer-reviewed) verification of fishery management success provides the fishing industry with a tool to promote better management by their national governments and RFMOs. Ms. Simonds further explained, **"The UN Food and Agriculture Organization's Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries was identified as an appropriate set of standards to begin assessing the sustainability of individual wild-caught marine fisheries worldwide."**

The Roundtable participants recognized that many assessment, certification and labeling programs for commercial tuna fisheries already exist and noted that improvements could be made to them. Their accuracy and scientific vigor, such as accounting for trends and forecasting, could be improved by through better communication of fishery data to those conducting these fishery assessments. Improvements could also be made in how information is conveyed to the consumer. Eric Gilman of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and Roundtable lead organizer explained, **"To this end, participants agreed to improve communication to consumers on improving the sustainability of tuna fisheries and the basis for tuna sourcing decisions."**

IUCN and the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council agreed to continue to facilitate communication between the retail industry and tuna fishing industries to improve the scientific basis for seafood sourcing policies and achieve sustainable tuna fisheries. The Roundtable was co-hosted by IUCN (www.iucn.org/themes/marine) and the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (www.wpcouncil.org). Sponsors included the Sea Fish Industry Authority, UK (www.seafish.org), Royal Caribbean International (www.royalcaribbean.com) and the Hawaii Longline Association (hawaiilongline.org).

Roundtable participants included the **fishing industry**: Hawaii Longline Association, Luen Thai Fishing Venture Ltd., National Fisheries Institute, Organización de Profesional de Grandes Atuneros Congeladores, Pacific Islands Industry Tuna Association, Western Fishboat Owners Association, World Tuna Purse Seine Organization and Organisation Des Producteurs de Thon Congele; **retailers, buyers, exporters and processors**: Lidl Stiftung & Company KG, Migros (MICARNA SA), Tesco Stores Ltd., Whole Foods Market, Connors Bros. (parent company of Bumble Bee Foods U.S. and Clover Leaf Seafoods, Canada), Atuna, New England Seafood International Ltd.,

Seachill (Division of Icelandic Group UK Ltd.), MW Brands, and Maldivian Marine Products, and **intergovernmental organizations, including RFMOs:** IUCN, Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Indian Ocean Tuna Commission, Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission, Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency, Sea Fish Industry Authority, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, and Standards Norway (ISO/TC 234 Secretary).

BACKGROUND ON COMMERCIAL TUNA FISHERIES

- **Economic Importance:** Tunas and tuna-like species (e.g., billfishes) are an important food source, used mostly for canning and *sashimi*, and, due to their high economic value and extensive international trade, are an important global commodity. The export value of tuna products is about US\$5 billion. The value of global tuna products is 9% of total global fish trade.
- **Capture of tunas:** Demand for canned and fresh tuna has been rapidly and steadily increasing. The reported catches of the principal market species of tunas increased from less than 0.2 million tonnes in the early 1950s to a peak of 4.3 million tonnes in 2003. Purse seine, pelagic longline and pole-and-line fisheries are the primary commercial tuna fishing methods. Purse seine fisheries catch about 58%, longline 15%, pole-and-line 14%, 'other' gears (coastal artisanal gillnet, handline, etc.) 13%, and troll <1% of the total combined weight of global landings of the principal market species of tunas. Longline vessels generally catch older age classes of bigeye and bluefin tunas for the fresh fish market, while purse seine vessels catch younger age classes of target skipjack and yellowfin and incidental bigeye tunas. Like purse seiners, pole-and-line vessels catch fish close to the surface, catching mostly skipjack and small/juvenile yellowfin, albacore and bluefin, and most of the catches are canned. The top four countries contributing to the 2002 tuna catch were Japan (550,000 tonnes, 18% of total global reported tuna landings), Indonesia (500,000 tonnes, 16% of total), Taiwan (460,000 tonnes, 15% of total) and the combined European Union member states (445,000 tonnes, 14% of total).
- **Tuna consumption:** In 2005, 82% of tuna was consumed as canned product, 18% as fresh product (including as *sashimi*). Japan consumed 78% of the fresh tuna. In 2004, canned tuna consumption was highest in the European Union (734,444 tonnes) followed by the U.S. (445,847 tonnes), combined accounting for 83% of the total global consumption of canned tuna.
- **Status of tuna stocks:** Despite their high fecundity, most tuna stocks are fully exploited, and some are overfished or even depleted. All yellowfin, bigeye and bluefin stocks are fully or overexploited; some albacore stocks are overexploited. It is unlikely that the major tuna species can sustain greater catches. Even for the few remaining tuna stocks that are only moderately exploited (albacore in the South Atlantic and South Pacific, skipjack in the Pacific and Indian Oceans), increased catches would not be sustainable because tunas of stocks that are fully/overexploited are caught together. Despite limited entry and catch quota efforts by the five regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs), tuna fleets continue to grow with concomitant increases in tuna fishing mortality, biological overfishing, stock declines and fishing overcapacity.
- **Bycatch:** Bycatch of sensitive species groups, including sea turtles, seabirds, marine mammals and sharks, in purse seine and pelagic longline fisheries, and bycatch of juvenile and undersized tunas in purse seine fisheries, is problematic. Substantial progress has been made to identify effective methods to minimize seabird and sea turtle bycatch in pelagic longline fisheries and to minimize direct mortality of dolphins in Eastern Pacific purse seine fisheries. Despite dolphin conservation measures, dolphin populations have not recovered at expected rates, perhaps because the stress of having purse sets made on them causes dolphins to miscarry or separate from and lose their calves. Relatively little progress has been made to resolve the bycatch of sharks and whales in both longline and purse seine fisheries, sea turtles in purse seine fisheries, and juvenile/undersized tunas in purse seine fisheries. Pole-and-line fisheries have extremely low bycatch levels compared to longline and purse seine fisheries; some bycatch of juvenile kawakawa tuna, frigate mackerel, mahimahi, and rainbow runner; and high post release survival rates of discards due to this fishery's use of barbless hooks and flick-off practices.

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Sustainable Tuna Roundtable

Agenda - 21 April 2008 (Brussels)

- 8:00 – 8:30 Registration, coffee break
- 8:30 – 8:40 **Welcome** (IUCN and WPRFMC)
- 8:40 – 9:00 **Announcements, review agenda, introduce participants and facilitators** (Dr. Cathy Roheim, University of Rhode Island; François Simard & Eric Gilman, IUCN) *Eric Gilman, IUCN*
- 9:00 – 9:30 **Sustainable seafood ‘movement’, current and potential future retail markets for sustainable and eco-labeled tuna products.** *Lucy Pelham Burn, New England Seafood International Limited & Nigel Edwards, Seachill (Division of Icelandic Group UK Ltd)*
- 9:30 – 9:45 **Initiative to establish an agreed, standardized method to assess the sustainability of retailer seafood sourcing practices.** *Melissa Pritchard, Marine Conservation Society*
- 9:45 – 10:00 **BSI British Standards Responsible Fishing Scheme, Good Practice Guide for Tuna, and Sri Lanka tuna fisheries.** *Dr. Jon Harman, Sea Fish Industry Authority and Stephen Akester, Macalister-Elliott*
- 10:00 – 10:05 **ISO technical committee on fisheries and aquaculture - technical standards for marine capture fisheries.** *Mr. Erik Sterud, ISO TC 234 Secretariat*
- 10:05 – 10:15 **Overview of commercial tuna fisheries and priority management issues.** *Eric Gilman, IUCN*
- 10:15 – 10:45 Coffee break
- 10:45 – 11:00 **Purse seine industry perspective on demand for safe and sustainable sources of seafood.** *Engr. Augusto C. Natividad, World Tuna Purse Seine Organization and Philippine Tuna Council*
- 11:00 – 11:15 **Pacific Islands longline industry perspective on the demand for sustainable sources of seafood.** *Mr. Charles Hufflett, Pacific Islands Tuna Industry Association*
- 11:15 – 11:30 **Troll and pole and line albacore industry perspective on demand for sustainable sources of seafood.** *Mr. Wayne Heikkila, Western Fishboat Owners Association*
- 11:30 – 12:00 **Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency pre-assessment of WCPO tuna fisheries against the Marine Stewardship Council principles and criteria.** *Dr. Len Rodwell, Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency and Dr. Tim Adams, Secretariat of the Pacific Community*
- 12:00 – 12:15 **FAO Eco-labeling Guidelines, Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, and FAO Next Steps in Response to Retail Industry Demand for Practical Sustainability Standards.** *Dr. Grimur Valdimarsson, FAO*
- 12:15 – 13:45 Lunch
- 13:45 – 14:30 **Discussion Session 1: Prospects, pros and cons of assessing/certifying/labeling individual tuna fisheries or companies, and consensus optimal approach for assessments/certification.**
- 14:30 – 15:00 **Discussion Session 2: Opportunities to improve communication of fishery data – optimizing the factual basis of fishery sustainability assessments and seafood sourcing policies.**
- 15:00 – 15:30 Coffee break
- 15:30 – 16:30 **Discussion Session 3: Options for development and ownership of an agreed, unified, standardized methodology to assess the sustainability of marine capture fisheries and retailer seafood sourcing practices.**
- 16:30 – 17:30 **Recap main meeting conclusions and agreed next steps.**