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International fisheries talks (ICCAT)

Bluefin tuna pushed closer to extinction as talks make purely cosmetic changes to allowable catch

The annual meeting of ICCAT (International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas), which sets annual fishing limits for Atlantic tuna and other large fish, ended today in Paris after intense, clandestine negotiations. The Greens criticised the outcome on bluefin tuna, with the talks agreeing a total allowable catch far higher than that necessary to protect the species from collapse. Commenting on the outcome, Green MEP **Raul Romeva y Rueda**, who attended the meeting, said:

"Negotiators have pushed bluefin tuna closer to extinction by agreeing to a total allowable catch far higher than is required to prevent the species from collapse. The talks agreed on an insignificant reduction of the total allowable catch for bluefin tuna - from 13,500 tonnes to 12,900 tonnes - but given that this species is so critically depleted the change is purely cosmetic. Fortunately, despite intense lobbying, France failed to get support to reduce the payback it must make for its massive overfishing in 2007."

"There was some good news this year at last for sharks. Shortfin mako, oceanic whitetip and hammerhead sharks will receive protection from 2011, since vessels will not be allowed to keep or sell any of these species (except for local consumption of hammerheads). This hard-fought-for measure should help these severely depleted species. Unfortunately, ICCAT did not think that other species in difficulty - thresher and porbeagle - merited similar protection."

"For other species that receive less attention, there was little improvement. There are no new measures to control the swordfish fishery in the Mediterranean since the southern EU member states would not allow the European Commission to table a proposal to this end. The bigeye tuna in the Gulf of Guinea is also poor shape but here as well, ICCAT could not find the courage to adopt stricter conservation measures."

"The ten-day meeting, involving 500 people, afforded a golden opportunity to have serious, in-depth discussions on improving management for several very important fisheries. Instead, all serious negotiating took place in the corridors rather than on the floor of the meeting. ICCAT still refuses to recognise the need for transparency and open participation in its deliberations. This lack of transparency is a further indictment of this annual process, with horse-trading ensuring ICCAT does not address the precarious nature of the fish stocks it is supposed to protect."

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