

October 21, 2020

Mr. Chris Oliver
Assistant Administrator for Fisheries
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Mr. Oliver:

We, the undersigned organizations, write to you to strongly urge the United States to follow the science and urgently end overfishing of western Atlantic bluefin tuna (WBFT).

As the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) begins to negotiate 2021 management via email correspondence, we implore the U.S. to lead or support efforts to lower the 2021 WBFT catch limit to 1785 t per year, ending overfishing with an approximately 60% probability. The science is clear – the stock is declining, and the current quota of 2350 t has a 94% chance of continued overfishing if rolled over into 2021. This would be unacceptable, a clear violation of ICCAT's mandates as well as domestic requirements under the Magnuson-Stevens Act, jeopardizing the credibility of both ICCAT and NOAA Fisheries. We are further concerned that any move by the U.S. ICCAT delegation to support such an action will put at risk our domestic efforts to conserve bluefin and support sustainable bluefin fisheries.

It is important to note that in order to halt the decline of this population, the catch would need to be below 1000 t per year. Our suggested quota reduction to promote an end to overfishing of this iconic species is the minimum required action for ICCAT and for the U.S. government. The distinguished delegate from Japan, who chairs bluefin negotiations at ICCAT, has already proposed a 1785 t catch limit for 2021. The U.S. should simply support the Chair's effort. We are disappointed to see that the U.S. submitted a competing proposal, which while not yet specifying an exact catch limit, sets the stage for the U.S. championing an effort to continue overfishing of this depleted stock.

We wish the U.S. delegation to ICCAT the best of luck during this fall's deliberations and stress that ending overfishing of western bluefin tuna should be one of the U.S.'s top priorities.

Thank you for your consideration.

All the best,

Amanda Nickson
The Pew Charitable Trusts

Shana Miller
The Ocean Foundation

Jason Schratwieser
International Game Fish Association

Barbara Block, Ph.D.
Stanford University

Andrea Treece
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cc: Andrew Lawler