

Seafood News - Environment Sustainability

■ Reaction mixed to bluefin tuna decision



By [Steven Hedlund](#), *SeafoodSource* editor

3/18/2010 3:08:07 PM - Thursday's vote rejecting a proposed international trade ban on Atlantic bluefin tuna ignited an onslaught of reaction from fishermen, seafood professionals, lawmakers and environmentalists.

At a meeting in Doha, Qatar, the 175-nation Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) quashed the controversial proposal for an Appendix I listing for the species,

with **68 votes against, 20 in favor and 30 abstentions.**

Reportedly, Japan was able to generate support from China, South Korea and several African nations to rebuff the proposal, which Monaco introduced last summer. About 80 percent of all bluefin tuna landed in the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean Sea ends up in the Japanese market. Canada also opposed to the proposal.

“Japan is very much concerned about the status of Atlantic bluefin tuna, and Japan has been working so hard for many years to ensure recovery,” Masanori Miyahara, chief counselor of the Fisheries Agency of Japan, told delegates. “But our position is very simple. Let us do this job in ICCAT (the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas), not in CITES. This position is shared by a majority of Asian nations.”

The European Union asked for a delay in the implementation until May 2011 to respond to its fishermen's concerns, while [the United States](#) was among the handful of countries backing the proposal.

However, **U.S. Sen. Olympia Snowe (R-Maine), among the 15 legislators who signed a 25 February letter asking Commerce Secretary Gary Locke and Interior Secretary Ken Salazar to oppose an Appendix I listing for Atlantic bluefin tuna, applauded Thursday's vote.**

“Approval of this listing would have had crippling effects on the U.S. bluefin tuna fishery, and institutionalized a perverse incentive by effectively punishing countries like the United States that attempt to impose responsible domestic fisheries

management,” said Snowe. “Indeed, today’s decision is the right tonic at the right time. It will allow domestic and international managers to continue to move forward with the vital work of rebuilding drastically overfished stocks without imposing the burden of unnecessary and punitive trade barriers.”

“We at the American Bluefin Tuna Association (ABTA) are exceptionally pleased with the rejection of **the Pew-dominated effort to destroy the U.S. commercial fishery for bluefin tuna and our markets permanently, as they have done with swordfish.**”

ABTA Executive Director Rich Ruais told SeafoodSource from Doha. “I am proud of the fishermen contributing to the ABTA effort, especially the directors. Thanks to the Japanese government as well for ... fighting the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and PEW coalition.”

The ABTA contended that CITES should not be used as a fishery management tool, and that enforcing ICCAT regulations on non-compliant nations can be accomplished by other means.

“We’re very encouraged by the preliminary results, because Canada's position all along has been that that this species should be managed through a regional fish management program, which we have in ICCAT,” said Canadian Fisheries Minister Gail Shea. “The challenge will be to strengthen ICCAT to ensure that conservation measures are adhered to.”

On the other hand, the environmental community was disappointed and frustrated by Thursday’s vote. Susan Lieberman, director of international policy for the Pew Environment Group, deemed it “an unfortunate step backwards.”

“This deeply disappointing and irresponsible vote signals a bleak future for this iconic fish,” she said. “This meeting presented a golden opportunity for governments to take a stand against overfishing, and too many governments failed to do so. The Atlantic bluefin tuna will not receive the protections of a suspension in international trade that it so desperately needs. The market for this fish is just too lucrative and the pressure from fishing interests too great for enough governments to support a truly sustainable future for the fish.”

“After overwhelming scientific justification and growing political support in past months — with backing from the majority of catch quota holders on both sides of the Atlantic — it is scandalous that governments did not even get the chance to engage in meaningful debate about the international trade ban proposal for Atlantic bluefin tuna,” said **Dr. Sergi Tudela, fisheries director at WWF Mediterranean, who attended the meeting.**

ICCAT “has repeatedly failed to sustainably manage this fishery,” he added.