

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

February 25, 2010

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington DC 20240

The Honorable Gary Locke
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Salazar and Secretary Locke:

We write regarding the management of the Atlantic bluefin tuna. As you know, in July of 2009, the Principality of Monaco proposed listing the Atlantic bluefin tuna as an 'Appendix I' endangered species under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species in Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). This proposal was made in response to the ineffective management of Atlantic tuna fisheries by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna (ICCAT), which has presided over a decline in stocks of 72% to 82% since 1970.

At a meeting in November of 2009, ICCAT took the unusual step of revisiting its management objectives for Atlantic bluefin tuna and lowered the total annual catch limit for bluefin by 40% for 2010. It has also agreed to develop a management plan that has a 60% probability of rebuilding the Atlantic bluefin stock by 2023. Although these measures are not as stringent as the U.S. has previously supported, they are significant steps forward and are consistent with the recommendations of ICCAT's scientific committee. As such, ICCAT has gone a long way toward correcting the sustained lack of science-based management identified by Dr. Lubchenco, and arguably it is bringing itself closer to the strengthened management and compliance measures the United States has demanded.


It is clear that the United States' support of the Monaco proposal helped spur ICCAT to take this action. Without the threat of an Appendix I listing, it seems unlikely that ICCAT would have strengthened its management objectives. Nonetheless, because ICCAT has taken these steps, we believe the new ICCAT management plan must first have an opportunity to work before an Appendix I listing is adopted. In addition, adopting an Appendix I listing at this time could have an adverse and unintended impact on the resource. Indeed, if the bluefin tuna were listed, it is likely that one or more countries would elect to exempt themselves from any CITES requirement for bluefin tuna, undermining the protection that CITES listing is designed to offer. Notwithstanding, NMFS' October 2009 report on the potential economic effects of a ban on trade of Atlantic bluefin tuna, which found that "[U.S.] Atlantic bluefin tuna fleet revenues are most likely to increase as a result of a trade ban," there is a great deal of uncertainty about the real-world impact among fishermen and some questions have been raised about the assumptions of the NOAA analysis.

This is not to say that CITES listing may not be necessary in the future, and given the effect the threat of a listing has produced, this option should not be taken off the table. If ICCAT reverts to its old ways and fails in its commitments to rebuilding under a scientifically supported timeframe, then listing Atlantic bluefin as an Appendix I protected species under CITES may be an appropriate mechanism to ensure recovery.

Conservation of a species like the Atlantic bluefin tuna is both important economically and ecologically essential, and we applaud efforts made by the U.S. ICCAT delegation to end overfishing.

Thank you for your consideration of our thoughts and those of the fishing communities we represent.

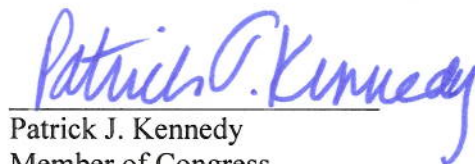
Sincerely,



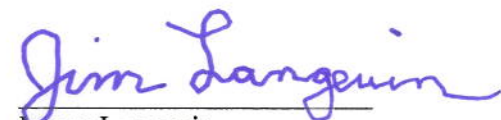
Jack Reed
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



Patrick J. Kennedy
Member of Congress



James Langevin
Member of Congress