



European Economic and Social Committee

NAT/608
Recovery plan for Bluefin
tuna

Brussels, 16 October 2013

OPINION

of the
European Economic and Social Committee
on the

Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EC) No 302/2009 concerning a multiannual recovery plan for bluefin tuna in the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean
COM(2013) 250 final – 2013/133 (COD)

Rapporteur: **Mr Sarró Iparraguirre**

On 12 May 2013 and 28 May 2013, the European Parliament and the European Commission respectively decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Articles 43(2) and 304 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, on the

Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Council Regulation (EC) No 302/2009 concerning a multiannual recovery plan for Bluefin tuna in the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean
COM(2013) 0250 final – 2013/0133 (COD).

The Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 1 October 2013.

At its 493rd plenary session, held on 16 and 17 October 2013 (meeting of 16 October), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 137 votes to 2 with 4 abstentions.

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1. **Conclusions and recommendations**

- 1.1 The Committee welcomes this amendment to Regulation (EC) No 302/2009, as it shows that real results are being achieved in the recovery of bluefin tuna in the Eastern Atlantic and the Mediterranean.
- 1.2 The Committee again urges the European Commission to apply this Regulation as strictly as possible to all the Member States and ICCAT Contracting Parties.
- 1.3 The EESC reiterates its acknowledgement of the efforts made over recent years by the European Commission, the Member States and fishermen to comply with the demanding multiannual recovery plan, with the ensuing social and economic consequences that should be taken into account.
- 1.4 The EESC urges the Commission and the Member States to further develop their information activities, raising awareness about the reality of the bluefin tuna situation and the results of the recovery plan's implementation.
- 1.5 The EESC believes it is essential, in order to safeguard the recovery of bluefin tuna, for the type of fishing gear the EU will permit for fishing throughout the year to be clearly stated after Article 7(6).

2. Introduction

- 2.1 The present opinion concerns proposal COM(2013) 250 final, which seeks to make a new amendment to Council Regulation (EC) No 302/2009 concerning a multiannual recovery plan for bluefin tuna in the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean.
- 2.2 Bluefin tuna is one of the most important species governed by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT). The EU is a contracting party to the ICCAT Convention.
- 2.3 In 2006, the ICCAT launched a recovery plan for bluefin tuna, prompting Regulation (EC) No 1559/2007, which was the first to establish a multiannual recovery plan for bluefin tuna in the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean.
- 2.4 Regulation (EC) No 1559/2007 was repealed by Regulation (EC) No 302/2009 in response to ICCAT Recommendation 08-05, adopted at its 16th Special Meeting in 2008, establishing a new recovery plan for bluefin tuna.
- 2.5 At its 17th Special Meeting in 2010, the ICCAT adopted Recommendation 10-04 amending the earlier recovery plan by introducing a further reduction of the total allowable catch, strengthening measures to reduce the fishing capacity and reinforcing fishery control measures. As a result, an amendment to Regulation 302/2009 was adopted as Regulation (EU) No 500/2012 in order to implement these international conservation measures at Union level.
- 2.6 The European Economic and Social Committee issued opinions supporting the European Commission's proposals for both regulations, as it supports this most recent amendment, recognising the efforts being made by the Member States and fishermen to comply with the ICCAT's demanding recovery plan for bluefin tuna, and calling for scientific research to continue.

3. Scientific position

- 3.1 Since the 16th Special Meeting in 2008, the ICCAT has observed a recovery in the biomass of bluefin tuna in the Eastern Atlantic and the Mediterranean.
- 3.2 The Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS), the scientific committee that advises the ICCAT, stated, among other things, in its 2012 Executive Summary report that¹:

¹ http://www.iccat.es/Documents/SCRS/ExecSum/BFT_EN.pdf.

- 3.2.1 Catch limits have been in place for the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean management unit since 1998. In 2002, the Commission fixed the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for the East Atlantic and Mediterranean bluefin tuna at 32 000 t for the years 2003 to 2006 and at 29 500 t and 28 500 t for 2007 and 2008, respectively. Subsequently, it established TACs for 2009, 2010, and 2011 at 22 000 t, 19 950 t, and 18 500 t, respectively. However, the 2010 TAC was revised to 13 500 t, establishing a framework to set future (2011 and beyond) TAC at levels sufficient to rebuild the stock to BMSY [Biomass Maximum Sustainable Yield] by 2022 with at least 60% probability. The 2011 and 2012 TAC were set at 12 900 t.
- 3.2.2 The 2010 ICCAT Recommendation 10-04 was the fundamental driving force behind the recovery of bluefin tuna because, while providing for a further reduction of TACs to 12 900 tonnes for 2011 and 2012, it had a decisive impact on reducing the fishing capacity and on control measures, leading to a very significant reduction in the number of vessels and to effective control of their catches.
- 3.2.3 Although care is needed when considering estimates of catch using capacity measures, the Group's interpretation is that a substantial decrease in the catch occurred in the Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean Sea through implementation of the rebuilding plan and through monitoring and enforcement controls.
- 3.2.4 Additionally, higher abundance or higher concentration of small bluefin tuna in the north-western Mediterranean detected from aerial surveys could also reflect positive outcomes from increase minimum size regulation. Rec.[06.05] also resulted in improved yield-per-recruit levels in comparison to the early 2000s as well as to a greater recruitment to the spawning stock biomass due to higher survival of juvenile fish.
- 3.2.5 The implementation of recent regulations and previous recommendations has clearly resulted in reductions in catch and fishing mortality rates. All CPUE indices showed increasing tendencies in most recent years. The Committee notes that maintaining catches at the current TAC (12 900 t) or at the 2010 TAC (13 500 t) under the current management scheme will likely allow the stock to increase during that period and is consistent with the goal of achieving Fishing Mortality Maximum Sustainable Yield and Biomass Maximum Sustainable Yield through 2022 with at least 60% of probability.
- 3.3 The EESC welcomes the report by the ICCAT's scientific advisory committee, which shows a clear trend towards bluefin tuna recovery, since it has firmly supported all the legislative proposals submitted by the European Commission concerning the multiannual recovery plan for bluefin tuna in the Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean.

4. **Modifications contained in the ICCAT Recommendation**

- 4.1 In 2012, the ICCAT Commission adopted a new Recommendation 12-03 amending its 15-year multiannual recovery plan (2007-2022).

- 4.2 This recommendation sets the TACs at 13 500 tonnes annually beginning in 2013 and thereafter, until such time the TAC is changed following SCRS advice. Of these 13 500 tonnes, 7 548.06 tonnes are allocated to the European Union. This means that after a number of years of reduced TACs and numerous efforts to bring about bluefin tuna recovery, the trend has been reversed this year and TACs have been increased by 600 tonnes, in line with scientific recommendations.
- 4.3 Moreover, with the aim of better adapting fishing seasons to the activities of fleets, the recommendation modifies fishing seasons, which are to be considered open seasons in contrast to the closed seasons indicated in previous ICCAT recommendations.
- 4.4 In addition, the actual dates when fishing is permitted by purse seiners, bait boats and trolling boats have been modified.
- 4.5 Finally, to avoid any uncertainty for those gears which are not subject to any specific rules on fishing season, it was necessary to include a provision explicitly allowing all other gears the possibility to fish all year round.
- 4.6 With regard to the allocation of quotas to the EU in ICCAT waters for 2013, the Council Regulation on TACs and quotas² laid down the fishing opportunities for each Member State and established that the season for purse-seiners will be from 26 May 2013 to 24 June 2013, in order to allow Member States sufficient time for planning.
- 4.7 The EESC considers all the modifications set out in ICCAT Recommendation 12-03 to be logical, congratulates the European Commission, the Member States and fishermen on their commitment to achieving this multiannual recovery plan for bluefin tuna, and urges the European Commission to press ahead with the efforts it is making.

5. **Amendment of Regulation (EC) No 302/2009**

- 5.1 In the light of the above, the proposal for a regulation amends Article 7 of Regulation (EC) No 302/2009, establishing the fishing periods for each of the types of fishing vessels authorised to catch bluefin tuna.

² Regulation (EU) No. 40/2013, [OJ L 23, 25.1.2013](#).

5.2 Article 7 is worded as follows:

"Fishing seasons

- 1) Bluefin tuna fishing shall be permitted in the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean by large-scale pelagic long line catching vessels over 24 m during the period from 1 January to 31 May with the exception of the area delimited by West of 10°W and North of 42°N, where such fishing shall be permitted from 1 August to 31 January.
- 2) Purse seine fishing for Bluefin tuna shall be permitted in the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean during the period from 26 May to 24 June.
- 3) Bluefin tuna fishing by bait boats and trolling boats shall be permitted in the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean during the period from 1 July to 31 October.
- 4) Bluefin tuna fishing by pelagic trawlers shall be permitted in the eastern Atlantic during the period from 16 June to 14 October.
- 5) Bluefin tuna recreational and sport fishing shall be permitted in the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean from 16 June to 14 October.
- 6) Fishing for Bluefin tuna by other gears than those mentioned in paragraphs 1 to 5 shall be permitted throughout the year."

5.3 The EESC supports this amendment to Regulation (EC) No 302/2009, considering it to be logical since Article 7, as amended, gives a clearer indication of the "open fishing seasons" compared to the concept of "closed fishing seasons" in the previous Article 7. At the same time, it amends the actual dates when fishing is permitted by purse seiners, bait boats and trolling boats, and stipulates that gears which are not subject to any specific rules on the fishing season may be used all year round. The Committee therefore considers that it would be appropriate to add the following sentence to Article 7(6): "in accordance with the conservation and management measures set out in Recommendation 12-03".

5.4 In connection with this authorisation, the EESC believes it is essential, in order to safeguard the recovery of bluefin tuna, for the type of fishing gear the EU will permit for fishing throughout the year to be clearly stated after Article 7(6).

6. **General remarks**

6.1 The EESC welcomes this amendment to Regulation (EC) No 302/2009, as it shows that the applications and modifications introduced each year point to the fact that during the first six of the planned 15 years of the multiannual plan, they are producing real results in the recovery of bluefin tuna in the Eastern Atlantic and the Mediterranean.

- 6.2 The Committee again urges the European Commission to apply this Regulation as strictly as possible to all the Member States and ICCAT Contracting Parties.
- 6.3 The EESC reiterates its acknowledgement of the efforts made over recent years by the European Commission, the Member States and fishermen to comply with the demanding multiannual recovery plan, with the ensuing social and economic consequences that should be taken into account.
- 6.4 The Committee wishes in particular to recognise the work being carried out by all the scientific institutions, in the both Member States and the Contracting Parties, by the European Commission and by the ICCAT itself with a view to moving ahead determinedly with this multiannual recovery plan for bluefin tuna. It would extend this recognition to the European Fishery Control Agency.
- 6.5 Lastly, the EESC urges the Commission and the Member States to further develop their information activities, raising awareness about the reality of the bluefin tuna situation and the results of the recovery plan's implementation.

Brussels, 16 October 2013.

The President
of the
European Economic and Social Committee

Henri Malosse
