



UK Atlantic Bluefin Tuna.



Frequently asked questions.

Are Atlantic Bluefin Tuna really present in UK waters?

Yes! Since 2016, giant Atlantic Bluefin Tuna - ABFT - have appeared in substantial numbers in waters around the British Isles. From Cornwall, South West Wales and throughout the Western Isles of Scotland, hundreds of sightings have been made. Dozens of fish up to 700lbs have been caught accidentally by anglers fishing for sharks, and have been carefully revived and released.

Can UK Anglers legally fish for them?

The Government's position is no, it is illegal to do so. The UK is member of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas - ICCAT - but has no share of the EU's 16,000 Tonne Quota. ICCAT Rules state that without a Quota, a member cannot authorize any Recreational Fishing for Bluefin, even a Live Release fishery. Recreational Fishermen of numerous other Quota holding EU member states CAN currently fish for Atlantic Bluefin, including Spain, France and Italy, but we cannot.

The EU has a 16,000 tonne Quota? I thought Atlantic Bluefin were endangered?

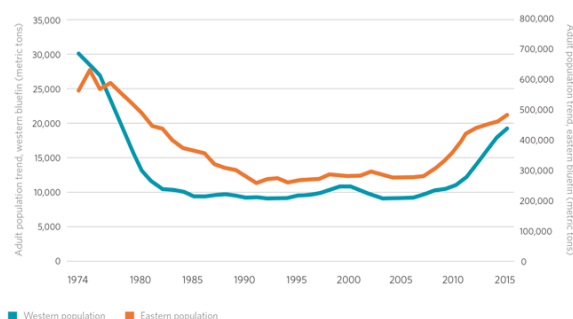
Ten years ago stocks were collapsing after decades of commercial overfishing. In 2011, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) listed the status of the stock Globally as 'Endangered' in its 'Red List'.

In 2007 ICCAT took action and implemented a 15-year recovery program. It slashed quotas and ramped up enforcement. From legal and illegal captures of around 60,000 tonnes, by 2011 they were down to c13,000.

ICCAT's detailed population assessments since indicate a substantial recovery in stocks in the years following the introduction of this program. Some models indicate a doubling of the Stock to levels not seen since the 1960's.

This significant recovery has been acknowledged by major Conservation Groups including the WWF and Pew Charitable Trust, a high profile sustainable fisheries Campaign group.

Figure 2
Western Atlantic Bluefin Population Assessment Likely Influenced by Eastern Recovery
Similar trends may be the result of the populations mixing in western feeding grounds



Note: The western population curve assumes an older age of first reproduction—one of two scenarios examined by ICCAT's Atlantic bluefin tuna species group and used here for simplicity. The vertical axes are scaled to show relative change in size of each population rather than absolute comparisons between the two populations.

Source: International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas

© 2017 The Pew Charitable Trusts

Alessandro Buzzi, Fisheries Projects Manager at WWF Mediterranean in 9/2017

"The measures adopted for the recovery of the species are generating very positive results, with bluefin tuna no longer being overfished."

Amanda Nickson, Director of Tuna Conservation at the Pew Charitable Trust in 6/2017

"The good news is that after a critical independent performance review in 2008, ICCAT began to more closely follow scientists' advice—a trend that helped to support the recovery of North Atlantic swordfish and the dramatic growth of the bluefin population in the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean Sea".

Opponents of any proposal for a UK Bluefin fishery frequently cite their 2011 IUCN 'Endangered' status.

'European' Atlantic Bluefin comprise Over 90% of the total population. In 2014 the IUCN conducted a review of this key region, which 'was based on an earlier global assessment of the species but underwent significant revision at the IUCN European Marine Fish assessment review workshop held in Brussels, March 2014'.

This concluded with the IUCN Rating the status of the European stock BELOW the three 'threatened categories'. **The IUCN rated them 'Near Threatened', a full two notches improvement upon 'Endangered'** That's correct. Over 90% of the population of Atlantic Bluefin is actually ranked well below 'endangered' by the IUCN.

Persistent use of the 2011 'endangered' status is highly misleading given the subsequent recovery and rerating of the vast majority of the stock to a much lower threat level.

The increased stock was also used to justify significant increases in Quotas since 2014. They will reach 38,000 tonnes by 2020, 3 times the 2011 'recovery' quota, and not consistent with a population still 'endangered'.

So should the UK be able to catch and sell Bluefin Tuna?

Actually, we believe that there is a better alternative to the UK merely joining the long list of Countries simply exploiting Atlantic Bluefin Tuna Commercially.

So what is the alternative?

They are an iconic 'sportfish'. Growing to over a 1,500lb and with great strength, speed and stamina Atlantic Bluefin are one of the most sought-after gamefish on the planet. Anglers will spend small fortunes travelling the globe for a chance to hook, play and then release this 'king of gamefish'.

They are simply Too Valuable to catch only once

A Recreational Live Release fishery offers a number of major advantages over a Commercial one. (Studies of Canada's licensed and regulated Live-Release Bluefin fishery and from numerous tagging operations show that the survival rate of Bluefin when caught and released is in the order of 96%).

There are valid concerns about risks to that recovery from large Quota increases, and we by definition acknowledge that inherently in our proposal for an exclusively Live Release fishery until the outlook is clearer. Scientists also frequently cite a lack of good quality data as a problem when assessing the stock.

The Recreational capture and release of many hundreds of Bluefin in such a UK Fishery would provide a great opportunity to add to that pool of quality data through a parallel scientific program. Various forms of Tagging, DNA sampling plus simply recording fish size and location of capture are all hugely valuable.

But what about the potential Revenue lost when fish are returned?

A substantial bluefin tuna live-release fishery exists in Canada. A 2012 Study by the Ecology Action Centre (EAC) ('Reeling in Revenue'), of that fishery concluded that:

*'live release bluefin have the potential to generate up to **six times more** revenue on a per tonne basis than a commercially caught bluefin'.*

The study estimated that charter revenues alone generated CAD100,000 per tonne versus a Commercial, landed value of CAD17,000. This was before additional revenue from the Live Release fishery was incorporated, such as hotels, restaurants, fuel, bait, tackle etc.

This sounds like quite a radical approach versus the traditional commercial fishery?

Not really. Such fisheries already exist for many species across the globe. What is different here is that we have a blank sheet of paper upon which to write the script for an exclusively Recreational Live Release Fishery with all the benefits it brings for the fish and fishery owners.

By favouring this economically optimal, sustainable, scientifically valuable approach, the UK would be showing a new way forward, setting a new world benchmark in the management of this valuable, vulnerable species.

Validating a better approach might also just help change attitudes, and aid Atlantic Bluefin prospects Globally.

