

Response Statement - Atlantic Bluefin Tuna

December 8, 2011

Common Name: Atlantic Bluefin Tuna

Scientific Name: *Thunnus thynnus*

Status assessment by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC): Endangered

How the Minister of the Environment intends to respond to the assessment: The Minister of Fisheries and Oceans will undertake consultations with the governments of Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, Aboriginal peoples, stakeholders, and the public on whether or not the Atlantic Bluefin Tuna should be added to the *List of Wildlife Species at Risk* (Schedule 1) under the *Species at Risk Act* as Endangered. The Minister of the Environment will forward the COSEWIC assessment of the Atlantic Bluefin Tuna to the Governor in Council upon completion of consultations.

Once a species has been assessed by COSEWIC, further steps must be undertaken before it is added to Schedule 1 of the *Species at Risk Act*. For more information on this process, please view [The Species Listing Process Under SARA](#).

Reason(s) for status designation provided by COSEWIC: This iconic fish has been heavily exploited for over 40 years and the current abundance of spawning individuals is the lowest observed. Fishing is the main threat to the viability of the species and despite management efforts for the past 30 years to rebuild the population, there is little sign of population increase. The abundance of spawning fish has declined by 69% over the past 2.7 generations. While the cause of the decline, overfishing, is understood, it has not ceased and it is not clearly reversible. The spawning segment of the species was exposed to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in a portion of its spawning area in the Gulf of Mexico. While the effects of the spill on the species are currently unknown, it may represent an additional threat.

Occurrence: Atlantic Ocean

Competent Minister(s):

Minister of Fisheries and Oceans

Province(s) and territory (territories) to be consulted:

Quebec

Newfoundland and Labrador

New Brunswick

Nova Scotia

Prince Edward Island

Applicable federal legislation: Fisheries are managed and fish and fish habitat are protected under the *Fisheries Act*.

Conservation activities underway: Atlantic Bluefin Tuna fisheries in Canadian waters are under the authority of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), of which Canada is a Contracting Party. ICCAT has currently implemented a 10-year rebuilding plan for Western Atlantic Bluefin Tuna. Canada and other member countries receive an allocation of the overall western Atlantic Bluefin Tuna quota from ICCAT. DFO is responsible for managing this quota and the fishery, and does so using measures such as limited entry licensing, gear restrictions, observer coverage, fleet and individual quotas, and dockside and at-sea monitoring. Currently there is 100% dockside monitoring of Atlantic Bluefin Tuna landings, and every fish must receive a uniquely numbered tag and a catch document which allows the fish to be traced until its final point of sale. At-sea observer coverage is used to monitor the directed and by-catch fisheries and document discards. In an effort to reduce tuna by-catch, pelagic longline gear is restricted from some areas with a high incidence of Bluefin Tuna either seasonally or year-round. DFO is also currently drafting a new Integrated Fisheries Management Plan for this species, which will be in agreement with precautionary approach policies. In addition, Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS) are being introduced in the charter boat fishery in Gulf Region as part of efforts to improve compliance monitoring. Atlantic Bluefin Tuna habitat also receives some protection through closed areas such as the Gully Marine Protected Area.