



Mr. Karmenu Vella  
Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries  
European Commission

Brussels, 5 November 2018

**Subject: NGO reaction to the suspected laundering of unreported eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean Sea bluefin tuna catches**

Dear Commissioner Vella:

We are writing to you regarding the ongoing criminal investigation into the alleged laundering of significant amounts of unreported bluefin tuna by several EU Member States. The police operation 'Tarantelo' – led by Spanish security forces in collaboration with Europol– allegedly involves primarily Spanish companies, French and Italian ports and Maltese bluefin tuna farms, which together have been laundering an estimated 2500 tons of Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) bluefin tuna annually. Please be advised that we sent a letter last week to the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna (ICCAT) Executive Secretary, requesting that they make information on this case available to ICCAT parties (please find a copy attached to this email).

This criminal investigation, should the allegations prove confirmed and substantiated, would have uncovered very high levels of IUU fishing in the Mediterranean bluefin tuna fishery. The ability of just one company to launder close to a quarter of the European quota seriously questions the effectiveness of the current control measures established in the eastern bluefin tuna fishery, which are, on paper, among the most comprehensive set of control measures in any tuna fishery globally.<sup>1</sup>

Since 2010, the EU has been leading the fight against IUU fishing at the global level, and under your strong leadership, the EU has strengthened its role as a leader in international ocean governance.

It is in this context that **we believe that, as a champion of good fisheries governance, the EU should carefully consider any decision related to the management of bluefin tuna at the upcoming ICCAT 21<sup>st</sup> Special Meeting of 12-19 November and demand strong action in line with EU commitments to fight IUU fishing. In the face of the shocking findings of the criminal investigation and the potential level of IUU fishing in the bluefin tuna fishery, the undersigned organisations recommend that the European Commission:**

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<sup>1</sup> In 2016, 2,500 tons of unreported bluefin tuna would amount to 13% of the total eastern bluefin tuna quota (or almost a quarter, 22.3%, of the EU quota). In 2017, they would amount to 11% of the total bluefin tuna quota (or, 18.5% of the EU quota). It's also 25% higher than the Atlantic bluefin quota for the entire West Atlantic for those years.

- conducts its own independent investigation on the alleged laundering of 2,500 tons of bluefin tuna annually, and strives to identify any fishing vessels and bluefin tuna farms involved in such operations. An independent investigation is essential to consider not only criminal aspects but also infringement of fisheries rules as well;
- reports all available details to the ICCAT Compliance Committee, starting in 2018, including the actions that the EU is planning to take and the potential results of these actions;
- coordinates with the relevant Member States to enforce all existing measures at EU and national levels, including the Control and IUU Regulations. Take action against the operators, beneficial owners and EU nationals responsible for any IUU caught and/or farmed bluefin tuna. This includes carrying out audits of the control systems of the Member States involved, blacklisting of fishing vessels, withdrawing fishing and farming licenses and authorisations, imposing effective and dissuasive sanctions, and deducting of quotas under EU law;
- ensures that fishing and/or farming companies that are found guilty refund any public aid granted under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund;
- works together with the ICCAT Compliance Committee once the legal procedure concludes, to enforce applicable ICCAT compliance rules which require that any amount of unreported bluefin tuna will be deducted from the relevant quota allocation in subsequent years;
- **ensures, at the upcoming 21<sup>st</sup> ICCAT meeting of 12-19 November, that no further increases of bluefin tuna quotas are adopted; loopholes in the electronic Bluefin Tuna Catch Documentation (eBCD) system are removed (including derogations for intra-EU trade), and any new provisions which may weaken the existing management measure are opposed (e.g. increasing fishing capacity, increasing bycatch allowances for unauthorized vessels, adding derogations to the minimum size, or extending open fishing seasons).**

The EU has proven to be a leader in the fight against IUU fishing, and its policies and actions are contributing to improve fisheries management worldwide. But to remain credible, it must take decisive action when IUU fishing activities are uncovered at home too.

Yours faithfully,



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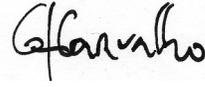
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