



WWF

HIGHLIGHT

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# SUSTAINABLE TUNA STOCKS

Market pressure was critical to bringing a tuna fishery back from the brink of overfishing. For over seven years, WWF has been working with scientists and tuna processors to make sure the world's tuna stocks are managed sustainably.

Dr Simon Cripps, former Director of WWF's International Marine Programme, warned in 2007 that "science demands a sharp reduction in the catch of bigeye tuna. Over the past decade this advice has been ignored. Once again the high seas are being fished out, and unless global intervention is effective, important fish stocks will be lost forever."

Back then the outlook was dire. Large bigeye tuna are highly valued in the sashimi market but purse seine fishing fleets were landing significant numbers of smaller fish that were processed into canned tuna. Individually, they were not worth as much as the larger ones. The cost to the species was immense, causing a more rapid and deeper decline in the bigeye stocks globally.

In the Eastern Pacific, the situation was especially bleak where conservation measures for the tropical tunas, including bigeye, had lapsed by the time that the ISSF had been created. The lack of agreed conservation measures by the member governments of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC), a Regional Fisheries Management

Organization (RFMO) which manages fisheries in the Eastern Pacific, allowed the decline of tropical tuna stocks to go on unabated for several years. A new approach was desperately needed.

## INDUSTRY INTERVENTION

One of the key issues is a lack of effective multi-national management. To address this, in 2009 WWF joined marine scientists and key players in the tuna processing industry to form the International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF). The ISSF issues conservation measures for the global tuna industry and advocates for effective regional management measures so that tuna fisheries can meet the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) standard without conditions.

The eight initial ISSF participating companies together controlled more than half the global canned tuna market. This gave the organization considerable clout from the outset – which it used immediately. In April 2009 the ISSF announced that its members would stop

*"A well-coordinated majority of the world's tuna processors, joined with WWF, advocated for immediate conservation action, with the potential consequence that a majority of the world's tuna processors would abandon transactions in bigeye from the eastern Pacific. That had never happened before."*

Susan Jackson  
the International Seafood  
Sustainability Foundation (ISSF)

## WWF TARGETS

**2020** 75% of tuna catches from stocks of all seven principal market tuna species (skipjack, yellowfin, bigeye, albacore, Atlantic bluefin, Pacific bluefin and southern blue) worldwide are qualified for certification in accordance with MSC standards

## PROGRESS

14% of global tuna caught sustainably and MSC certified (based on data available as of January 2016)

## PRIORITY COUNTRIES

### Production oceans

Indian Ocean, Pacific Ocean, Mediterranean Sea

### Markets

Japan, USA, EU

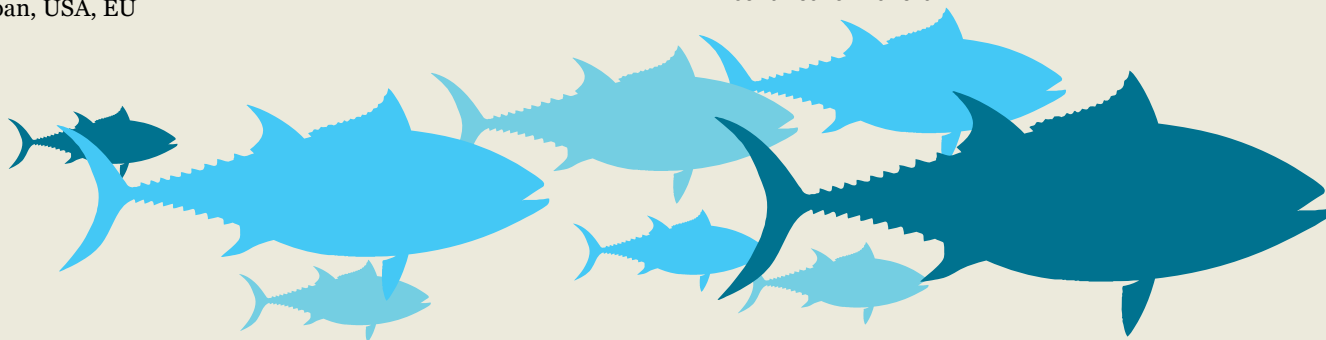
## CONTEXT

### Threats

- Tuna are prone to overfishing, with some stocks approaching complete depletion.
- Unsustainable bycatch of non-target species, many of which have high conservation and ecosystem value, including sea turtles, sharks and small cetaceans.

### Opportunities

- Improved regional fisheries management is critical to strengthening the governance of marine ecosystems;
- Poverty alleviation by transforming the economies of tuna fishing in the Indian and Pacific Oceans;
- Rights-based management and designing, financing and implementing international traceability systems can enhance the value of sustainable fishing practices and create incentives for fishers



buying bigeye tuna from the Eastern Pacific unless the IATTC agreed to science-based conservation measures that would allow the stock to be fished sustainably.

The IATTC member governments quickly responded to this concerted pressure and finally agreed to effective measures, including closing the purse seine fishery for two months a year, setting lowered quotas for longline fishing and setting aside a large area to reduce the catch of small bigeye.

“The measures weren’t perfect, but they reduced the bigeye tuna catch in the eastern Pacific Ocean. This helped to allow the stock to recover from heavy fishing pressure,” says ISSF President Susan Jackson. Following IATTC’s prompt action, the ISSF took bigeye tuna off its “red list” – but it’s ready to intervene again if necessary. Its members also agreed to a policy requiring vessels to be registered, audited and in compliance with the conservation measures.

## INCENTIVES FOR COOPERATION

The ISSF is building on its success with Eastern Pacific bigeye tuna in other areas. In particular, it’s campaigning for conservation measures for bigeye, yellowfin and albacore tuna. It’s been effective in getting stocks properly assessed, including previously unassessed stocks such as Mediterranean albacore and Indian Ocean

skipjack. The ISSF also collaborates with scientists and fishing crews to develop practical solutions for reducing bycatch – the unintentional catch of small tuna and other species.

The number of companies is growing too – from eight to twenty eight today, making up more than three-quarters of the global market. All have made commitments to sourcing MSC certified tuna and supporting the development of more sustainable practices.

“Processors have a priority interest in sustaining the fisheries that sustain their way of life,” says Susan. “When processors join with scientists and conservationists to focus on evidence-based solutions, such a broad coalition of stakeholders can truly incentivize international cooperation and effective action. We’ve seen it happen.”

“Our main goal is simple – 100 per cent of global tuna stocks sustainably fished.”



The *International Seafood Sustainability Foundation* (ISSF) exists to undertake science-based initiatives for the long-term conservation and sustainable use of tuna stocks, reducing *bycatch* and promoting ecosystem health.

**iss-foundation.org**



The Marine Stewardship Council contributes to the health of the world’s oceans by recognizing and rewarding sustainable fishing practices.

**msc.org**

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