

STATEMENT BY NORWAY ON THE HISTORIC CATCHES OF BLUEFIN TUNA AND THE SCIENTIFIC CONTRIBUTION TO THE COMMISSION

Bluefin tuna is a stock which has occurred along the Norwegian coast for thousands of years and is a stock which has been important to our fishermen along the coast for centuries.

Norway became a member to the ICCAT in 2004, and in 2007 Norway prohibited the catch of bluefin tuna in our waters, due to the grave condition the stock was in. In 2014-2016 we conducted a limited fishery with a strong focus on research. In 2017 we started a limited commercial fishery for bluefin tuna, still with a strong focus on research.

After the implementation of the rebuilding plan in ICCAT, the stock increased, and the bluefin tuna started to return to the Norwegian coastline. The stock is now definitely back in our waters, where it feeds in one of the worlds most productive marine ecosystems. A consequence of this feeding is that it might reduce the biomass on valuable pelagic stocks. Our fishermen are therefore to some extent paying for the increased bluefin tuna stock, and we are increasingly concerned for the impact the bluefin tuna will have on other stocks. Some of the schools of bluefin tuna in Norwegian waters in the late autumn are so large that our fishermen refrain from setting the purse seine in fear of getting catches that are too large to handle.

Norway had a large bluefin tuna fishery between 1950 and 1970, with an average catch of almost 5430 tonnes. The Norwegian share of the total catches in these years was around 20 %, and the catches were well documented. Scientific data from these catches has been forwarded to ICCAT. The Norwegian catch data from this period constitutes an important part of historical catch data for bluefin tuna.

Norway has provided data from the past 70 years on the bluefin tuna in our waters to the ICCAT, and Norway has contributed with scientific data from 268 000 individuals, which, when compared to our small share in the last years, is an impressive amount. Norway has also opened up for a tag and release fishery, where bluefin tunas are tagged with both conventional tags and electronic tags. This will still provide valuable information on the movement of the stock.

As of today, Norway provides ICCAT, and particularly GBYP, with large numbers of biological, ecological and genetic samples and data from all individual Atlantic bluefin tuna caught in directed fisheries and as bycatch in other fisheries (non-ICCAT fisheries) and in the recreational rod and reel fishery for BFT conducted in Norwegian waters. In addition, Norway is also conducting dedicated science on acoustic sonar recordings and visual observations of BFT in Norwegian waters.

Norway is a coastal state to the bluefin tuna stock. We have made a huge scientific contribution on bluefin tuna to ICCAT, and for several years we refrained from fishing for bluefin tuna in order to help rebuilding the stock. We continue to strive for improving our knowledge on the stock, both through new ways of maintaining the quality of the tuna we catch, for instance through the pilot project of short- term live storage, and on continuing to collect scientific data.