



# **UK Atlantic Bluefin Tuna.**



## ***Too valuable to catch just once.....***

### ***They're here.....***

In the Autumn of 2016 something very unexpected and significant occurred in the waters off the SouthWest of the UK.

Huge Atlantic Bluefin Tuna appeared just miles from the Cornish coastline, in numbers unprecedented in living memory. In the previous 2-3 years, occasional reports had been made of Shark Anglers hooking into "unstoppable monsters" that emptied their reels, smashed their line and even broke their rods. Marine Safari operators had reported sightings of large fish smashing the surface into foam pursuing Mackerel and Herring.

In 2016 however, these were not random fish. Hundreds of Bluefin parked themselves in the waters off of Falmouth for several weeks and feasted on masses of prey. It was inevitable perhaps that accidentally or otherwise, a number of these fish, averaging from 250-350lb, were hooked by anglers, brought boatside and released. The capture of these fish were reported in various media forms, stunning the UK fishing world.

In 2017 they returned. Not just to Cornish waters. Bluefin were also encountered in the Celtic Deeps, off of SW Wales, and in waters around Scotland's Western Isles.

In 2018 once again they have reappeared, their distribution apparently wider still and being reported in yet larger numbers, and larger size.

### ***Why...?***

From a path to extinction in the early noughties, Atlantic Bluefin have made a dramatic recovery. Their management is Governed by a Global body - ICCAT - the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas.

That body, consisting of nearly 80 countries, finally put in place an aggressive 'Recovery plan' in 2007, slashing quotas and ramping up enforcement. Aided perhaps by several productive spawning years, ABFT numbers have risen since, as confirmed by numerous Scientific Stock assessments. ICCAT has seen fit to nearly TRIPLE the Quota for these fish from the lows of 2011, to the planned 2020 targets.

Scientists are studying these fish\* appearing in UK waters to try and determine amongst other things, why they are here. It seems probable that one factor is changing currents and water temperatures that are impacting the migration patterns of their prey. UK Bluefin are following the food! It may also be that the rising numbers of Bluefin are also increasing competition, pushing these larger fish, tolerant of cooler water temperatures, into new waters in search of food.

\* ThunnusUK, run by Exeter University, see our website for more information.

## ***So can we fish for them?***

Well, the management of Atlantic Bluefin is a complex issue. The Global Quota is agreed by ICCAT's members and divided up between them. The EU receives a substantial element of that Quota over 50% of the total. Based upon the historic presence of these fish, a history of fishing for them, and the existence of a fleet to do so, that quota is allocated to a relatively small group of EU members. Spain, France and Italy receive the lion's share. The UK is one of a number of countries with NO QUOTA for Atlantic Bluefin, precluding Commercial fishing for them.

ICCAT rules applying to member countries, (of which the UK is one, under the EU umbrella), state that ONLY members with a Quota may authorize a Recreational fishery, and allocate some (or all) of their Quota to it, for "retained fish" or as a "Mortality quota" for a Catch and Release Fishery.

However, we currently have NO Quota. On that basis, the UK's fisheries authorities - DEFRA and the MMO - have declared that UK anglers may not target Bluefin in UK waters.

Whilst in the EU. Obtaining a part of the EU's precious, valuable quota would require extensive negotiation and horse trading. Such a process could take many years and come at a high cost in reciprocal quota exchanges. However....

## ***A "Brexit opportunity"....***

The UK's impending departure from the EU presents a great opportunity in relation to Bluefin. Upon departure, the UK is free to join ICCAT as a Sovereign member, and request a quota in its own right, joining the majority of other ICCAT members.

The UK Government would then have the discretion to determine how it allocates that Quota, with regard to commercial and/or recreational interests.

This presents a once in a generation opportunity to "do the right thing" and establish a sustainable, economically optimal, scientifically important fishery for Atlantic Bluefin.

## ***And so to our headline....***

Atlantic Bluefin Tuna are an iconic gamefish. Growing to over 1,500 pounds, and with great strength, speed and stamina, they are one of the most sought after gamefish on the planet. Anglers will pay fortunes and travel the globe for a chance to hook, play and then release this king of gamefish.

Studies show that the economic value of such fisheries when devoted to Recreational anglers is MULTIPLES per tonne of that of a Traditional Commercial fishery.

In particular, when a relatively small quota is utilised to account for the 5% or so mortality associated with a Live Release Fishery, the Economic outcomes SWAMP that of a Commercial fishery, with numerous additional benefits. An independent study\* of Canada's Recreational Live Release fishery shows that it is worth SIX TIMES per tonne that of their Commercial fishery.

\* Commissioned by the Ecology Action Centre. See our website for more details.

***It is our belief that the UK should do exactly that.  
A small initial quota should be applied to a Recreational Live  
Release fishery, facilitating a world leading, world class,  
Bluefin Tuna fishery in UK waters.***

***Why Live Release?***

Despite the increase in numbers, there is still uncertainty amongst some Conservation Groups and Scientists that ICCAT quota increases may have gone too far and yet risk reversing the real improvement in the stock of the last 8-10 years.

Additionally, little is known about the scale and origin of these 'UK Bluefin'. Are they as a stock particularly vulnerable to overfishing?

We just don't know. Operating an exclusively live release fishery for several years would give us a window to establish with more certainty the answers to these questions.

Indeed, the operation of such a fishery with a parallel Scientific program, incorporating various Tagging operations, and DNA sampling, could HELP PROVIDE those answers.

One merit of such a fishery is the greater Societal Benefit in comparison to Commercial fishing. Visiting anglers spend huge amounts of money, not just on Charter fees, but on Hotels, Restaurants, fuel, tackle and a host of other things. These Economic benefits are widely distributed across Communities, much more so than Commercial fisheries. This expenditure occurs in parts of the year that are otherwise 'lean' tourist periods, in areas that rely greatly upon such seasonal Revenue, as well as EU grants, soon to cease.

In 2014 in a CBC news interview covering Canada's Nova Scotia live release fishery, bluefin charter boat captain Robert Boyd stated:

*"With the charter industry, right now we're employed for six to seven weeks every fall, instead of just one or two days (harvesting their commercial quota).*

*The economic spin off to that are just as valuable to the surrounding community as much as they are to us...*

*It's different from commercial fishing. It's more of a tourism business than a fishing business..."*

After several years of operating such a well regulated fishery with parallel scientific tagging and DNA sampling, an independent review should be undertaken into the evidence gleaned from it.

At that point, in conjunction with further evidence available of the status of the stock, it could be determined what the next steps should be. Only at that point should any form of 'retained' fishery be considered, to operate alongside an ongoing Live Release fishery. The key is that it must be science based, and show that it would optimise the economic and scientific benefits whilst operating in a sustainable fashion.

It would show the UK as a world leader in the management of this incredible 'icon of the seas'.

Our Campaign is taking these arguments to UK Politicians and with your help, we may yet succeed in establishing such a fishery in UK waters post Brexit.

Follow our Campaign on Facebook - [Bluefin Tuna UK](#)  
Or on our Website – [www.bluefintuna.co.uk](http://www.bluefintuna.co.uk)

**Steve Murphy**  
**Conservation Officer**  
**Sportfishing Club of the British Isles (SCBI)**

