



A Future for Atlantic Bluefin Tuna in the UK

Introduction

Over the last three years, huge Atlantic bluefin tuna have appeared late each summer in UK waters. A global stock recovery program has seen numbers recover sharply from danger levels ten years ago. From Cornwall and Wales to the Outer Hebrides, these unique fish are now present in unprecedented numbers. Dozens of fish up to 700lb have been hooked accidentally by anglers and safely released.

Until the 1950s the UK had a thriving and highly valuable recreational Bluefin Tuna fishery operating mainly out of Scarborough under the auspices of the Tunny Club. Commercial overfishing of both herring and tuna saw stocks collapse and British big game anglers resorted to spending £1000s pursuing these magnificent fish overseas. However, with the recent stock revival there now exists a real opportunity to establish a world-class, sustainable, valuable live-release recreational fishery in our waters. In conjunction with a parallel scientific research program, this would not only contribute significantly to our knowledge of these tremendous fish but would guard against moves to reinstate unsustainable commercial harvesting and the inevitable illegal fishing that would occur if no one was looking out for the stocks.

Background

Atlantic bluefin stocks had been collapsing due to decades of commercial overfishing and in 2007 the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) finally took action with a 15-year recovery program that slashed quotas and ramped up enforcement. Stocks recovered and quotas were gradually increased from 2014 and will rise to 38,350 tonnes by 2020, nearly three times the 'recovery' level of 2011.

The EU is a member of ICCAT and has a 16,000 tonne quota, rising to over 19,000 tonnes by 2020. All but 1-2 per cent of this is allocated to commercial interests predominantly in Spain, Italy and France.

ICCAT rules dictate that only member states with a quota may authorize sports or recreational fishing. In common with Ireland, Denmark and Sweden the UK has no share of this EU quota and is therefore unable to fish for them either commercially or recreationally

A “Brexit opportunity”

The UK’s impending departure from the EU presents a great opportunity for us to join ICCAT as a sovereign member and request a quota in our own right.

We may not even need to request a share of the quota already allocated to other countries as a small ‘reserve’ quota is held by ICCAT to be allocated to new ‘artisanal’ fishery opportunities.

The new UK fishery could, through a parallel research program including tagging of fish captured by anglers, contribute significantly to existing science based research aimed at increasing our knowledge of this incredible and highly mobile species. Use of the recreational angling sector to help execute such program is already taking place in Sweden and Denmark, including in those part funded by WWF.

The establishment of a tightly regulated live-release tuna fishery would provide a significant boost to local economies in Cornwall, West Wales, Northern Ireland and the North West of Scotland.

The UK government would have the discretion to allocate any quota how it sees fit, with regard to commercial and/or recreational interests. We strongly believe it’s time to break the mould of outdated fisheries management approaches and allocate that quota exclusively to a live-release sports fishery.

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 tuna.

Bluefin Tuna - a great sporting opportunity

Atlantic bluefin tuna are an iconic sporting fish. Growing to over 1,500lb and with great strength, speed and stamina, they are one of the most sought after gamefish on the planet, second only perhaps to blue marlin.

A substantial bluefin tuna live-release fishery exists in Canada, where studies show that its economic value of is **six times per tonne** that of a traditional commercial fishery.

A study in 2012 by the Ecology Action Centre (EAC) estimated that recreational charter revenues alone created a value of \$100,000 per tonne versus the landed value from commercial fishermen of \$17,000. This was before additional revenue generation related to the charter industry was assessed, i.e. hotels, restaurants, fuel, bait, tackle etc.

Our Proposal

Rather than giving this valuable resource away at a knock down price to commercial interests, the establishment of a live-release recreational fishery represents the best way of ensuring a future that works best for the fish, the science, and the local communities.

We are proposing the introduction of a licensed fishery that would control the number of vessels deliberately targeting tuna along with a mandatory reporting and monitoring system. Controls on the tackle employed would help ensure the best fish welfare conditions in order to limit mortality, although this remains remarkably low at less than 5%.

This fishery would set a new benchmark in sustainable management of a recovering species. It would be one of the most highly regulated and controlled in the world, putting the interests of the

fish at its heart and contributing to the government's ambition in its 25 Year Environment Plan for the UK to develop world leading fisheries management post-Brexit.

We envisage an accompanying scientific program of reporting, tagging, and DNA sampling that could contribute greatly to our further knowledge of Atlantic bluefin tuna stocks and the drivers for their renewed presence in the UK.

Although some may argue that it is too early in the recovery of the species to develop a new UK fishery these fish are here and are already being caught as bycatch. The option of doing nothing risks seeing the increase in illegal fishing and the development of the thriving black market. Having responsible anglers as stakeholders in the bluefin tuna recovery can only be a good thing.

Our Campaign

Bluefin Tuna UK are a group of individuals and organisations who believe passionately that this iconic fish needs to be managed in a sustainable, economically optimal way. The Angling Trust is the national representative body for all forms of recreational fishing and is supporting the call for the re-establishment of a British recreational bluefin tuna fishery. We are building support amongst MPs and businesses who see the huge economic potential of re-establishing a UK Bluefin Tuna fishery.

Website and Facebook

Find us at <https://bluefintuna.co.uk/> and on Facebook [here](#).

In the news for three years:

- [Daily Telegraph 2015: 'Shoal of Bluefin tuna appears of coast of Cornwall'](#)
- [Daily Mail 2016: 'Cornish fishermen caught huge 300lb Bluefin tuna'](#)
- [ITV 2017: 'Climate change drawing new species into UK waters'](#)
- [BBC 2018: 'Could big game fishing return to the UK?'](#)

More information:

Government Advice: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/bluefin-tuna-in-uk-waters>

WWF: <https://www.worldwildlife.org/species/bluefin-tuna>