

Fishing regulators meet to rescue tuna from disaster

by Bend Weekly News Sources

Important stocks of tuna are now at risk of commercial extinction due to weak management warns a WWF briefing paper released ahead of the first meeting of the world's five tuna management organizations that comprise the main mechanism for regulating fishing on the high seas -- areas beyond national laws -- where most tuna catches occur.

WWF's new briefing paper, *Tuna in Trouble: Major Problems for the World's Tuna Fisheries*, details rampant illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, unsustainable quotas and far too many boats competing for the remaining tunas.

Despite efforts by some governments within tuna Regional Fisheries Management Organizations, populations of important species such as bluefin tuna are critically depleted. Atlantic bluefin, used for high-end sushi and sashimi, is severely overfished and the spawning stock of Southern bluefin in the Indian Ocean is down approximately 90 percent.

"This is a critical meeting -- the first time that management organizations from all countries will meet to create a global strategy for managing tuna," said Tom Grasso, director, WWF Fisheries Program. "This kind of strategy is crucial for healthy tuna populations that will sustain fishing. For too long governments have routinely ignored scientific advice, failed to implement conservation and management measures, turned a blind eye to illegal fishing and not prosecuted those who flout the rules. "

The capacity of the world's tuna fleet is now far greater than required to catch a sustainable level of tuna. In 2002 in the Eastern Pacific Ocean, the capacity of the purse-seine fleets targeting bigeye and yellowfin tuna was 70 percent higher than needed to catch the quantity advised by scientists. Disputes about allocation of fishing quotas also tend to have a paralyzing impact on the regional management organizations. In a number of cases, quotas are ignored or simply increased to accommodate new entrants to the fishery.

Tuna management organization have also largely failed to minimize incidental of marine species, known as bycatch, such as sharks, marine turtles, seabirds, small whales and dolphins, although WWF applauds the Inter- American Tropical Tuna Commission's efforts to reduce the bycatch of marine turtles by encouraging the use of circle hooks. Initial results indicate they can reduce the number of turtles killed in long-line fishing operations by as much as 90 percent.