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DRAFT RACMED POSITION ON BLUEFIN TUNA FISHING

22 October Brussels meeting of the RACMED working group on the issue of blue fin tuna fishing, in preparation for the upcoming ICCAT meeting in Paris, where, based on the assessment of current stocks, fishery management recommendations - including the catching quotas for the period 2011 - 13 will be defined,

Whereas

- 1) The management measures already adopted in previous years, during which the ICCAT recommendations have already led to a major reduction of the fishing effort (affecting all segments of the fleet), and in catches (down from 32,000 tonnes in 2007 to 13,500 in 2010) both in the allotted annual timeframe (for purse seiners and long liners above 24 m), and in the systems used to search for tuna (ban on aircraft);
- 2) The resulting reduction in fishing fleets, which in some Member States do not exclusively fish blue fin tuna, though this is the main source of income;
- 3) The mandatory control and monitoring systems (on-board observers, declarations, VMS) and the control regulation allowing the EC to halt fishing when stock levels show signs of suffering;
- 4) The already difficult adjustment of the European blue fin tuna sector to current limits, an adjustment that has already led to the scrapping of large numbers of vessels in recent years, with a subsequent loss of jobs;
- 5) The large investment made by ship owners still operating in the sector, their unwillingness to scrap ships often only just recently built, and the economic viability of an activity that, despite the crisis, is maintaining employment levels and responding to the high demand from the European market;
- 6) According to the 2010 annual report of the SCRS assessing blue fin tuna stocks presented at the ICCAT 4-8 October meeting in Madrid, a net recovery of stocks and a reduction in mortality can be observed, no mention is done of a risk of collapse; the report also mentions that maintaining current quotas would enable the optimal biomass to be reached in 2022, thereby complying with EC objectives and commitments;



RAC Med requests the European Commission

To take into account the above and in particular the results of the stock assessment report carried out by the SCRS of ICCAT, and to propose at the next Council of Ministers scheduled for October 26 in Luxembourg that the EU takes a favourable position at the ICCAT meeting in Paris, maintaining the 2010 catch quota (13.500 tonnes) for the period 2011-2013.

Considering the adverse weather conditions, it also requests the EC to reconsider the fishing season schedule, and to provide fishing enterprises with the opportunity of fully utilising the total number of fishing days allowed for purse seiners and long liners above 24 m.

Last but not least, RAC Med expresses its dismay at the lack of any consultation and information on the subject to date from the European Commission, just days before the next Council of Ministers and less than a month before the plenary of the ICCAT meeting, and expresses its perplexity that it has had to learn from news agencies of the guidelines announced by the Commissioner in Parliament.

RAC Med hopes this is not due to any lack of consideration on the part of the Commission for dialogue with the sector, which would be contrary to the principles of the Treaty of Lisbon, and hopes that the EC will intensify its meetings and discussions with all stakeholders in the fisheries sector in the coming days.

This opinion has been endorsed by working group participants, with the exception of the WWF, which expressed an opposing opinion, and the Confederación Española de Pesca Marítima de Recreo Responsable which expressed its reservations on mentioning explicitly the quota of 13,500 tonnes, a decision which it considers should be referred to ICCAT.

