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## PRESS RELEASE

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**CONTACTS:** Claudia Orlandini  
LIFE Communications Officer  
Landline: +32 (0)2741 2433  
Mobile: +32 (0)499 197 858  
[communications@lifeplatform.eu](mailto:communications@lifeplatform.eu)

### **Bluefin tuna and ICCAT 50 years on.**

#### **Time to correct historic wrongs, and return rightful access to small scale fishers.**

Brussels, 16<sup>th</sup> November 2016 - The Low Impact Fishers of Europe (LIFE) Platform **calls on ICCAT contracting parties to establish a dedicated, non-transferable, ring fenced Bluefin tuna quota for small scale low impact fishers.** In a detailed document prepared for ICCAT, which focuses on France and Spain, LIFE make their case for allocating a fair share of tuna quotas to coastal fishing activities using gears and methods with a low environmental impact and a high social value.

Meeting in Vilamoura Portugal from 14 to 21 November, the 51 (50 + EU bloc) contracting parties of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna (ICCAT) will consider the fate of tuna and tuna like species, and of tuna dependent fisheries. This is particularly important for many small-scale low impact fishers from European Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts **whose traditional livelihoods have been wrecked by the uncontrolled expansion of industrial scale drift net (now banned in the EU), purse seine, and longline fisheries.**

Established in 1966 by the International Convention for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas, which entered into force in 1969, this year ICCAT celebrates its 50th Anniversary.

Previously perceived as favouring the interests of larger scale tuna interests, the last decade has seen ICCAT transformed from pariah into paragon. A 2009 independent review slated ICCAT Bluefin tuna policies as an "international disgrace". Then, following the strict implementation of the ICCAT Bluefin tuna recovery plan, including drastically reduced TACs, ICCAT has been applauded for "sticking to science". Subsequently, ICCAT has been able to propose an increase in Bluefin tuna quotas by 20% per year from 2015 to 2017.

Action must now be taken by ICCAT to ensure that the benefits of these quota increases will not just accrue to the very industrial fleets that led to the progressive demise of Bluefin tuna fisheries in the first place, and whose unsustainable fishing operations continue to pose a threat to fish stocks, livelihoods and communities. What is needed is a specific, fair, non-transferable TAC set aside for small scale low impact fishery activities. Since 2006, under the ICCAT recovery plan, in Europe (notably in Spain and France) small scale tuna fisheries have been severely curtailed. At the same time, there has been an **increasing concentration of quota in the hands of a relatively few large fishing corporations, facilitated by quota transferability.** Transferable fishing rights, often in the form of individual transferable quotas (ITQs), require adequate controls to prevent privatizing access to fisheries, creating speculative markets for rights, and concentrating ownership. Such controls are often lacking or poorly applied, and as a result, small scale fishery activities are generally the first to be suffer.

In the Mediterranean, **industrial purse seine fishing linked to tuna fattening operations, pose a major threat to Bluefin tuna and forage fish stocks,** and to the wider marine environment. Its expansion has contributed to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing; the targeting of smaller size fish for tuna fattening

operations and the use of forage fish stocks as feed threaten sustainability; and pollution from the fattening cages is transforming healthy habitats into poisoned wastelands.

The fishery for Bluefin tuna, one of the oldest in the world, has been practiced for millennia in the Mediterranean Sea basin. Relatively small scale traditional fisheries prospered until the latter part of the 20th century, which saw the introduction and exponential increase of industrial fishing operations. From the 1960s onwards, each decade has been characterized by crises in the tuna fishery, starting in the Eastern Atlantic and moving into the Mediterranean – one of the main spawning and nursery areas for Bluefin tuna.

The low impact solution proposed by LIFE, and supported by EU laws, **is common sense**: distribute tuna quotas fairly, giving special consideration to traditional and artisanal fisheries, and providing incentives to fishing vessels deploying selective fishing gear or using fishing techniques with reduced environmental impact.

Overfishing by larger scale operators has caused the loss of innumerable small scale fishing businesses over many years, compounded by grossly inequitable allocation of quotas and policies that favour larger scale operators. Tuna has been no exception, and **ICCAT now has the opportunity to right these historic wrongs** and return a much needed and fairer balance that will ensure the survival and prosperity of small scale fleets that provide so many social, economic and environmental benefits to often vulnerable coastal communities.

*LIFE is a platform aiming to provide a clear and coherent voice at EU level for the previously mainly silent majority of European fishers, who are smaller scale and who use low impact fishing gears and methods, but have historically lacked dedicated and effective representation in Brussels and at Member State level. More information can be found at [www.lifeplatform.eu](http://www.lifeplatform.eu).*