



PRESS RELEASE

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2017 Bluefin Tuna Fishing Plan

11 Years Awaiting in Vain for a Fair Quota Allocation

Once again Spain has turned its back on historic injustices by denying rights to small scale fishers in the Mediterranean to access Bluefin tuna.

Brussels 14th February 2017.

- *The Low Impact Fishers of Europe (LIFE) deeply regrets that, in the division of rights in its 2017 Bluefin tuna fishing plan, the Government of Spain has once again chosen to overlook the historic injustices done to small scale fishers targeting Bluefin tuna, and continues not to recognize the sector, refusing to grant access to this fishery.*

- *In a detailed critique of the draft bill to regulate the Bluefin tuna fishery in the Eastern Atlantic and Western Mediterranean, LIFE emphasised several crucial issues that favour the fair allocation of tuna quota to polyvalent coastal fisheries activities using gears and methods with a low environmental impact and a high social value.*

On 7 February, **the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Environment, announced that the Spanish government had published its “Plans for the Fishery, Capacity, and Control of Bluefin tuna”** and had fixed the allocation criteria for the reserve pool of quota for 2017. Spain has availed of 4,243.57 tonnes of Bluefin tuna quota for this year. This is a 20.08% increase on 2016. However, overall the Government of Spain has stated in its press release that this quota increase does not correct in any way past mistakes and it will **continue benefiting the status quo:** increasing the fishing possibilities of the very industrial fleets that have caused the progressive demise of the Bluefin tuna fisheries in the first place, and overlooking – for another year – the Spanish small scale fisheries sector, notably in the Mediterranean.

Even if the Ministry itself states that all the different targeted fishing operations will benefit from these increases in fishing possibilities, it is certain that the Mediterranean small scale fleet is **inexplicably absent from those operations, despite the fact that the sector has mobilized on many occasions, and that it is now 11 years since it has been excluded from the fishery.**

In successive meetings, and in their critique of the “Draft Order for regulating the Bluefin tuna fishery in the Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean”, LIFE first and foremost urged MAPAMA to make a gesture and include the passive gear (artes menores) fleet from the Mediterranean coast (as

well as from the Canary Isles) in the “special census of the float authorised to carry out Bluefin tuna fishing”. This fleet has historically depended on Bluefin tuna fishing as part of its seasonally diverse polyvalent activities.

In its critique, LIFE also lamented that MAPAMA has, by not anticipating any substantial changes in the access conditions to the Bluefin tuna fishery, so as to allow the access of this important segment of the fleet, **contradicted both the spirit and the letter of Regulation UE 2016/ 1627 on the Bluefin tuna recovery plan, both in recital 4 and Article 8**. These call on Member States “to distribute national quotas fairly among the various fleet segments giving consideration to traditional and artisanal fisheries”, as well as to Article 17 of the Basic Regulation of the CFP.

However, the Spanish government has chosen to ignore these points. By contrast, LIFE considers that statements made by the Ministry that assert that “the Canary pole and line vessels and the incidental catches of the artisanal fleet in the Straights of Gibraltar and the Mediterranean will count on a larger percentage increase (of the increased quota)” are unfortunate as they could give the public a distorted view of reality. In fact, **the artisanal fleet in general has access to only 1.6% of the overall quota, allowing it to catch Bluefin tuna as bycatch, and the Canary artisanal fleet only has 4.4% of the global quota**.

LIFE is ruling out no options at this stage for the continuation of its work on the issue, as this will be a decisive year for Bluefin tuna in which the resource must transit from a recovery plan to a management plan. The proposals made by LIFE and the support provided by the EU laws make common sense: distributing Bluefin tuna quotas fairly, giving special attention to traditional and artisanal fisheries, providing incentives to fishing vessels that use fishing gears with low environmental impact. **For LIFE recovering access to this fishery is not only a question of social justice**, but rather we consider that Bluefin tuna could provide a key resource, “an oxygen bubble”, that would allow other fisheries to rest, small scale fishers to diversify their activities, and above all providing a tool that could be used to help the recovery of the Mediterranean small scale fishery in its entirety, as it is currently in a serious crisis.

Overfishing by large scale operators has caused the loss of innumerable small scale fishery businesses over several years, aggravated by the unfair allocation of quotas and policies that favour large scale operators. Tuna has not been an exception, and LIFE laments that the Spanish Government did not seize this golden opportunity, and, with small gestures, **correct these historic errors**, recognize the artisanal sector and begin to promote a necessary and just balance that guarantees the survival and prosperity of the small-scale fleets, which provide so many social, economic and environmental benefits to coastal communities.
