

# Eastern Atlantic BLUEFIN TUNA



## FACTS ABOUT BLUEFIN TUNA



There are three species of bluefin tuna: Atlantic, Pacific, and Southern. Of the Atlantic bluefin tuna species, there are two separate stocks, Eastern and Western.



Bluefin can swim as fast as 70mph when they need to, but not for long.



They can dive to >1000m, although they usually spend their time near the surface.



Bluefin tuna start out no bigger than an eyelash, gaining 1 kg in the first 6 months; at 10 years, a bluefin tuna is around 2m / 170 kg and can reach 2.7 m / 400 kg at age 20.



The world record for the biggest bluefin caught has stood since 1979 when a 679 kg bluefin was caught off the coast of Nova Scotia, Canada.

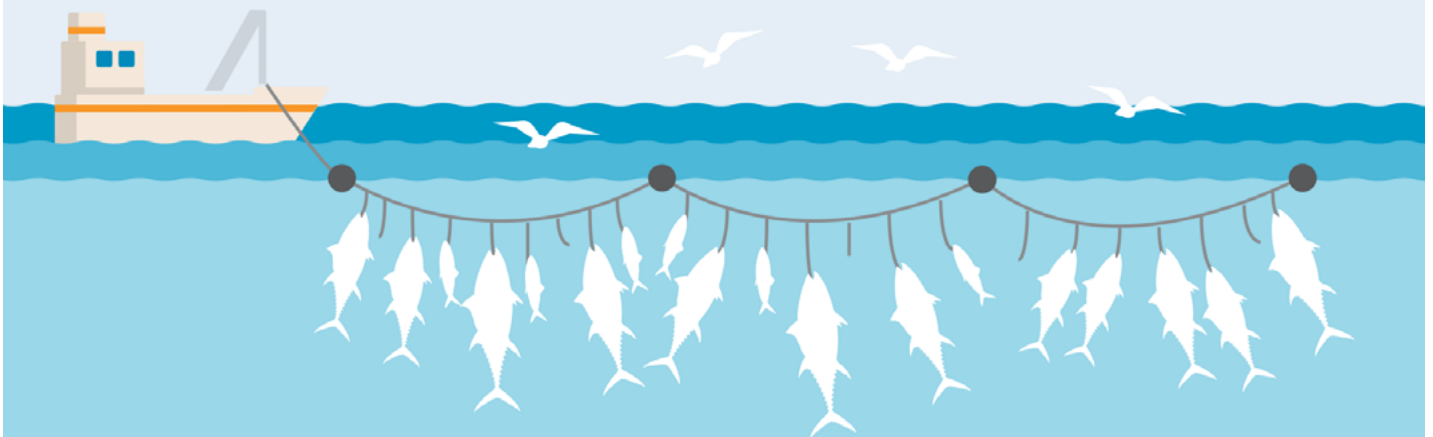


Eastern Atlantic bluefin are thought to be 100% mature by the age of five, while those from the Western Atlantic stock are about nine years old before they reach adulthood.



Bluefin are a long-lived fish, estimated to have a lifespan of around 40 years, by which time they could be as much as 3m long and can weigh as much as 750 kg.

## USUFUKU HONTEN LONGLINE ATLANTIC BLUEFIN TUNA FISHERY



**Status:** Independent adjudicator's decision means the assessor is set to recommend the fishery for certification after a two-year assessment process that included stakeholder feedback and formal objections

**Independent assessor:** Control Union UK

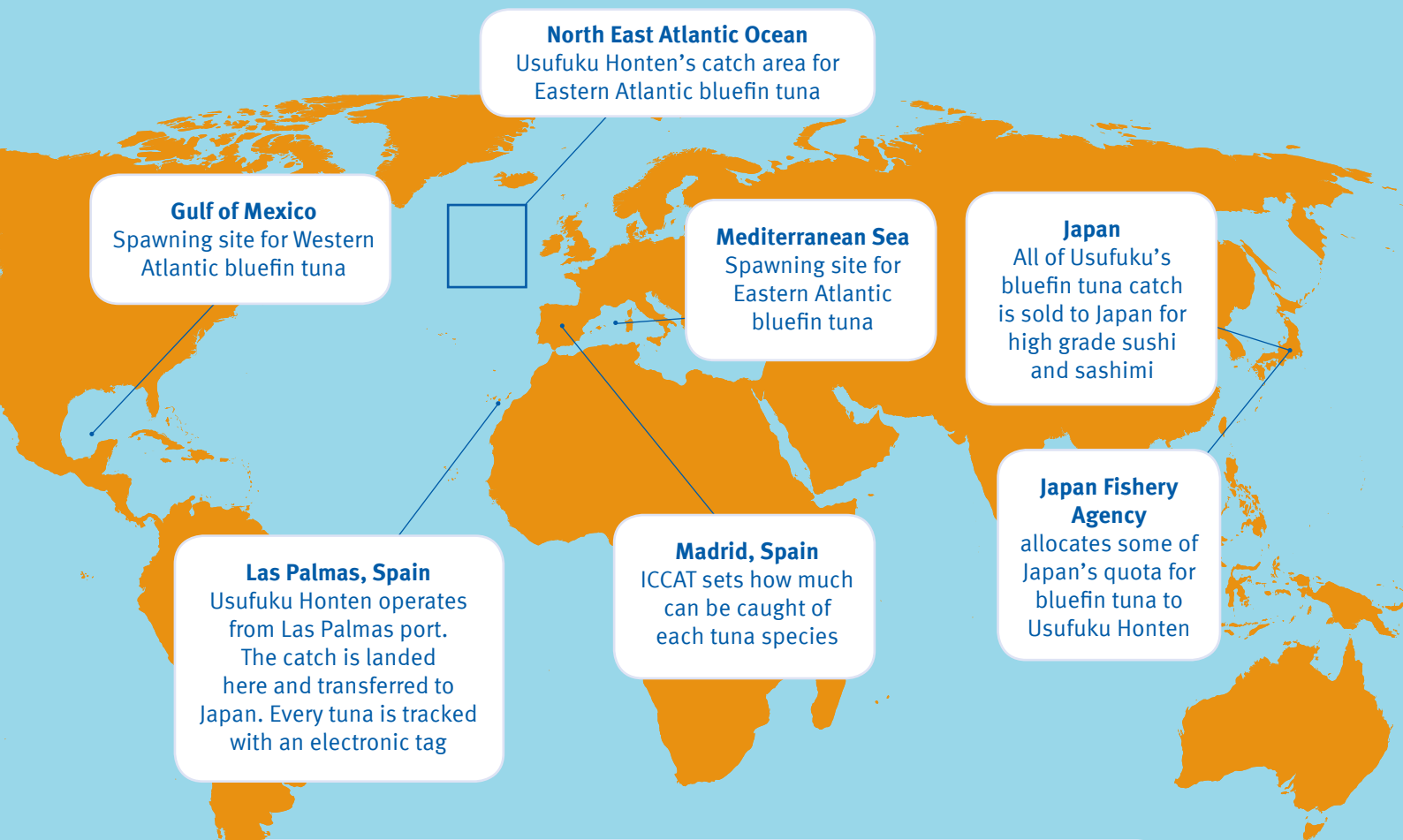
**Gear type:** long line

**Vessel size:** 58 metres

**Catch:** an average of 19 operating days per year from Oct-Nov catching Eastern Atlantic Bluefin tuna

In 2018, 55.3 tonnes caught of the 28,200 tonnes ICCAT total allowable catch, which is around 0.2% .

## STOCK AND FISHERY DETAILS






### WHAT IS ICCAT?

The International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) is the regional fisheries management organisation (RFMO) for the Atlantic and adjacent waters. It is responsible for overseeing the management of tuna species in the area.

**“While the science on stock level is looking promising, fishing sustainably requires very careful management. 20 years ago, demand for this prized tuna meant it was overfished and its numbers fell to dangerously low levels worldwide.”**

**CHIEF SCIENCE AND STANDARDS OFFICER  
AT THE MSC,**  
Dr Rohan Currey

In order to make a decision on whether this fishery is fishing sustainably, an independent assessment body must assess:

-  the bluefin tuna stock levels
-  protection of the surrounding marine habitats and other species
-  the management of the fishery

These requirements have been developed in consultation with scientists, NGOs and industry experts. These reflect international scientific consensus and conform to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) Code of Conduct for Responsible Fishing and the FAO Ecolabelling guidelines.

# PATH TO RECOVERY

**1980s**

Tuna gains popularity as a delicacy around the world

**1990s**

At the peak of overfishing, it is estimated 50,000 tonnes to 61,000 tonnes per year of bluefin were caught in the East Atlantic and Mediterranean Sea

**1998**

ICCAT establishes a total allowable catch for the first time, but fishers did not comply with it

**2005 - 2007**

NGOs campaign to end overfishing of bluefin tuna

**2007**

ICCAT implement a 15-year recovery plan after stock assessment shows bluefin tuna stocks are close to collapse

**2010 - 2014**

Several ICCAT stock assessments show bluefin tuna numbers are rising

**2015**

The International Union for Conservation of Nature lowered the extinction status of Eastern Atlantic bluefin tuna from 'endangered' (in 2011) to 'near threatened', as the recovery plan leads to higher stock levels



**2017**

ICCAT stock assessment shows bluefin tuna are no longer overfished in the Eastern Atlantic

**2019**

Management of bluefin tuna stocks switches from long-term recovery plan to a multi-year management plan. Total allowable catch continues to increase and is set at 36,000 tonnes for 2020 by ICCAT.

## FISHERY ASSESSMENT TIMELINE



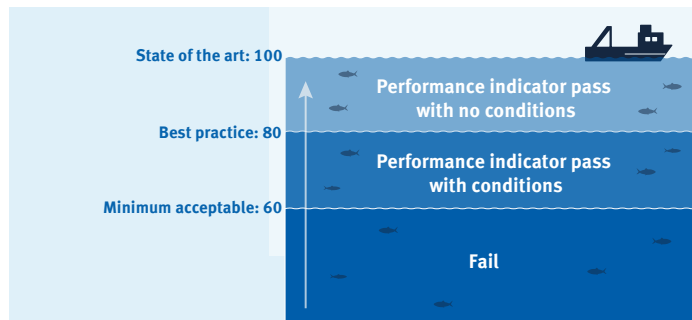
Full bluefin history timeline: [msc.org/bluefin-tuna-history](https://msc.org/bluefin-tuna-history)  
Full assessment timeline: [msc.org/bluefin-fishery-assessment](https://msc.org/bluefin-fishery-assessment)

# ACTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Fisheries that meet the MSC Fisheries Standard overall may have room for improvement in some areas.

‘Conditions of certification’ aim to raise the fishery’s performance to an ‘outstanding’ score of between 80 – 100.

Continued certification is dependent on these conditions being met.



Usufuku Honten bluefin fishery has seven conditions set by the assessor, which were adjusted in consultation with stakeholders. The fishery will be audited annually to check its progress.

Before the end of its five-year certification the fishery must:

- 1 Show there are well defined harvest control rules in place that ensure stock levels stay around the maximum sustainable yield
- 2 Show there is good information on all fishing from the stock, not just its own catch but Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated
- 3 Provide evidence its strategy to minimise bycatch works
- 4 Show the information for West Atlantic bluefin tuna is adequate to justify its management strategy
- 5 Provide evidence that the strategy to reduce endangered, threatened or protected species interactions through more accurate logbook records is being implemented successfully
- 6 Provide adequate quantitative data to measure trends on any unintended catch of endangered, threatened or protected species
- 7 Show that the Eastern Atlantic Bluefin Tuna stock is at or fluctuating around its Maximum Sustainable Yield, the highest catch that can be taken without affecting future reproduction

**“Much has been done to help the species recover in the East Atlantic. Other bluefin stocks in other seas have a long way to go to get to this level of recovery.”**

**CHIEF SCIENCE AND STANDARDS OFFICER AT THE MSC,**  
Dr Rohan Currey

## REDUCING THE IMPACT TO THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT

The fishery operates with longlines, baited hooks are attached to the longlines at intervals to attract the target species with no impact on habitats.

Regulations and mechanisms are in place to limit the impacts on bluefin tuna from the Western Atlantic stock, blue sharks and seabirds.

## SCIENTIFIC ADVANCES

Scientific advances have improved the reliability of the assessment of bluefin tuna populations through electronic tagging, migration habits, and the maturity and reproduction of bluefin tuna.

In 2018, ICCAT considered the objectives of the recovery plan to have been achieved. This made it possible to provide a gradual increase in quotas that remain in line with scientific advice.

## EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT MEASURES

Since 2006, ICCAT has adopted a drastic recovery plan which includes:

- Halving of the total allowable catch
- An increase in the minimum catch size to leave more juveniles in the water
- Limiting and monitoring the number of fishing licences
- Introducing fishing seasons and closed areas
- A regional observer program for vessels that catch bluefin tuna
- Strengthening control measures through satellite and aerial surveillance to reduce illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing

## ENSURING HEALTHY STOCK

ICCATs latest stock assessment shows that the Eastern Atlantic bluefin tuna population is now at healthy levels, similar to those in the 1970s before overfishing.

The current management plan has set the total allowable catch to allow the population to be maintained at healthy and sustainable levels.