

Retailers, suppliers call on WCPFC for emergency tuna management



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European and American tuna suppliers and retailers have called for new interim rules governing the sustainable fishing of Western and Central Pacific tuna stocks.

The group says the interim rules are needed "as quickly as possible", due to the failure to reach a comprehensive regulatory settlement agreed by country-members of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), which "allows unsustainable fishing to continue".

A Taiwanese purse seiner hauls its catch in the Western Pacific. Credit: Greenpeace

Interim targets should be in place within the next 12 months, read the letter addressed to the WCPFC - which will meet next week in Fiji -- with targets including limit and reference points for all target tuna stocks and key by-catch species where these are not currently in place.

Signatories to the letter, including retail giants Target, WM Morrison Supermarkets and Aldi Sud, note that finding a comprehensive fisheries management system is a "time-consuming and complex undertaking".

"We note that there have been efforts in the past to promote measures that will facilitate sustainable management of tuna and that there is considerable interest in the creation and implementation of harvest strategies for tuna species," the letter read.

"We also note that the creation of such strategies is a complex undertaking, involving the definition of objectives, target and limit reference points (and the acceptable risks of breaching them), a monitoring strategy, harvest control rules and other elements."

The value in an interim approach is that it provides management to the relevant fisheries but does not interfere with existing work plans to create species-specific reference points, the group said.

The development of all the required elements of the comprehensive harvest strategies could then continue in parallel with the interim targets.

The letter said that the interim plan would allow tuna fisheries in the Central and Western Pacific to meet the requirements of the UN fish stocks agreement. It also suggests the selection of appropriate interim reference points be based on regional fishery management organization, or exclusive economic zone, management regimes around the world.

In total, 30 retailers and suppliers signed the letter, including seven retailers (five in the US, two in the UK), and 23 suppliers (19 in the US, two in Canada, one in the UK and one in Spain). One tuna fishing organization (OPAGAC in Spain) also signed the letter.

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