

Regulators should rethink tuna quotas, study says

By JAMES KELLER / The Canadian Press

A new study shows that fishermen are landing bluefin tuna farther out to sea than previously thought.

And researchers say international regulations need to reflect that change to rebuild the bluefin's dwindling numbers.

Bluefin tuna, enormous fish that can weigh more than 600 kilograms and grow to three metres in length, are popular in Japanese raw fish markets and can fetch more than \$40 per kilogram.

In Canada, the Atlantic bluefin industry was worth more than \$15 million in 2000.

Currently, species are divided into eastern and western stocks, separated by an imaginary line from Greenland to the Gulf of Mexico.

The International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas, of which Canada is a member, sets a quota of 30,000 tonnes for the east and 2,800 tonnes for the west.

But a study to be published Thursday in the science journal *Nature* says bluefin tuna don't turn tail at the border.

"The problem with that is fish don't recognize this line in the middle," Michael Stokesbury, a PhD student at Dalhousie University in Halifax, N.S., who worked on the study.

"Drawing this line isn't probably a very effective way to manage the two stocks."

Between 1996 and 2004, researchers from the U.S. and Canada placed tracking devices on nearly 800 bluefin tuna caught off the coast of New England. They found many bluefin tuna that spawn in the Gulf of Mexico - and would be considered in the western quota - swim into eastern fishing waters to feed.

That means tuna reserved for western fisheries, which includes Canada and the U.S., are being caught on the eastern side of the dividing line.

With significantly higher quotas in the eastern side of the Atlantic, efforts to restrict fishing and rebuild numbers in western waters are hindered. Stocks are reportedly near a historic low point.

"It's really quite a crisis," said Stokesbury.

"There's no sense in just having an ocean full of tuna that nobody can fish, but the bluefin are in a really steep decline and we have to reduce the quotas and bring down the fishing so that the stocks can recover."



CP File

Fish plant worker Mike Demont, right, wrangles a 175-kilogram bluefin tuna on the wharf in Eastern Passage, as captain Alton Clark looks on last September.

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