

Scientists Call for Fishing Limits to Protect Tuna

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LONDON (Reuters) - Scientists called Wednesday for tighter commercial fishing restrictions to protect dwindling stocks of Atlantic bluefin tuna.

An electronic tagging study of the ocean predators by researchers at Stanford University in California and the Monterey Bay Aquarium identified two populations of Atlantic tuna and the need for an overhaul of how they are managed.

"In my lifetime we've brought this majestic species to the doorstep of ecological extinction in the western Atlantic Ocean," said Barbara Block of Stanford University.

"Electronic tagging provides the best scientific information we've ever had to properly manage these tuna and we must, as an international community, start to act responsibly to ensure the future of this species," she added.

Bluefin tuna are among the biggest bony fish in the sea. They can live up to 30 years old, grow to 10 feet long and weigh 1,500 pounds (680 kg).

They are a popular fish in restaurants around the globe but a particular delicacy in Japan where the price of a single giant tuna exceeded \$100,000 at a Tokyo fish market.

The International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), which has managed the bluefin stocks since 1969, estimates that the western population of bluefin tuna which spawn in the Gulf of Mexico, has declined by more than 80 percent since the 1970s.

The eastern stock has also dwindled.

The research, reported in the science journal Nature, showed that the two populations of tuna have a complex migratory life cycle.

"There are two ways to save the Atlantic bluefin tuna stock -- protect them in their breeding grounds and in their feeding grounds," said Block.

"This will require immediate action in both the central Atlantic, to reduce mortality of giant bluefin while foraging, and in the Gulf of Mexico and Mediterranean Seas, where bluefin breed as discrete populations," she added.

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