

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

December 16, 2009

Dr. James W. Balsiger
Acting Assistant Administrator of Fisheries
NOAA Fisheries Service
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Dr. Balsiger:

We are writing to request a 90-day extension of the comment period for the National Marine Fisheries Service's Proposed Rule RIN 0648-AX85 Atlantic Highly Migratory Species; Atlantic Bluefin Tuna Season and Retention Limit Adjustments. Given the depleted status of bluefin stocks and rapidly changing management scenarios, additional time is needed to assess the domestic management changes in the proposed rule within the larger international context.

Atlantic bluefin tuna populations are at an all time low, and the current international management regime is under global scrutiny. Last month, the scientific committee of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) concluded that both Western and Eastern Atlantic bluefin tuna populations are at no more than 15 percent of their historical baseline. Next year's ICCAT scientific assessments are expected to yield even worse results, and current management efforts by ICCAT have not curbed that decline. Concurrently, researchers at the University of British Columbia are completing a new scientific study on the status of Atlantic bluefin tuna which will provide valuable supplemental information.

The continued decline in Atlantic bluefin has led ICCAT scientists and the broader scientific community to conclude that the species qualifies for listing under Appendix I of Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). The Administration has expressed strong support for a proposal to include Atlantic bluefin tuna in Appendix I of CITES at the Conference of the Parties scheduled for March of next year. If a CITES listing were adopted, it would also have implications for both international and domestic management.

In light of all of these things, it is clear that additional time will be needed to consider the impacts of the proposed rule, and we respectfully request a 90-day extension of the public comment period.

Sincerely,



James E. Cyben
George Miller

Howard L. Berman



Tommy Baldwin

David Beckstein

Lois Copps

Jan Tan

Raul M. Grijalva

Edward J. Markey

Eul Blumen

Couryn D. Maloy

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Mike Simpson

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