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EU considers bluefin tuna protection

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Stanley Pignal in Brussels AUGUST 21 2009

Support is growing in Brussels for a commercial ban on bluefin tuna amid recommendations from policymakers to add the fish – prized by sushi lovers – to a list of endangered species.

The recommendations are included in a draft document prepared by the European Commission’s environment section. This will form the basis for the 27-member European Union’s common position ahead of the next meeting of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species.

“From a scientific and technical point of view, the criteria for the listing of Atlantic bluefin tuna [as an endangered species] appear to be met,” the draft states.

“There is no doubt about the link between international trade and overexploitation of the species.”

The idea of a moratorium on tuna fishing, to be enforced under [Cites](#), has gained traction in recent years as [bluefin stocks](#) have collapsed under heavy demand from Japan, where it is used to prepare the highest grade of sushi.

Several EU members, including France, the UK and the Netherlands, have publicly supported ending – or at least suspending – the [fishing of bluefin tuna](#).

However, others, notably Italy, Spain and Malta, are cool on the idea.

The proposal is also facing resistance within Brussels itself, particularly from the fisheries section, which sets quotas for Europe’s beleaguered fishing fleet and will try to soften the blow for the industry.

Commission officials confirmed the validity of the document yesterday, but stressed it was a draft and likely to change.

The fishing industry is gearing up for a comprehensive lobbying campaign in September, saying regulations adopted recently and endorsed by the EU are stringent enough. “Quotas have already been reduced and will be further reduced every year,” says Mourad Kahoul, president of the European bluefin fishermen’s lobby.

“Time should be given to assess the positive effect of the recovery plan adopted two years ago.”

The bluefin tuna has become a flashpoint in the debate over Europe’s foundering fishing policy. Environmental groups drew headlines recently when they warned that the population of breeding tunas would be wiped out in three years unless fishing was stopped.

Saskia Richartz, EU Oceans policy director at Greenpeace, welcomed the Commission’s thrust. “For the EU, which includes many of the main fishing nations, to recognise that bluefin tuna is endangered is a major milestone in preventing the imminent collapse of this species.”

Any ban would have to be agreed by two-thirds of the Cites convention’s 175 parties at the forum’s next meeting in March in Doha.

The EU’s 27 votes would represent a quarter of those needed to enact a ban.

The assessment made by Brussels already includes concessions to opponents of a ban: the rules would not come in until after the end of the 2010 fishing season, and constraints on tuna fishing would ease once stocks recovered.

Japan, which imports more than 90 per cent of Europe’s bluefin tuna catch, is the most vocal opponent of a ban.



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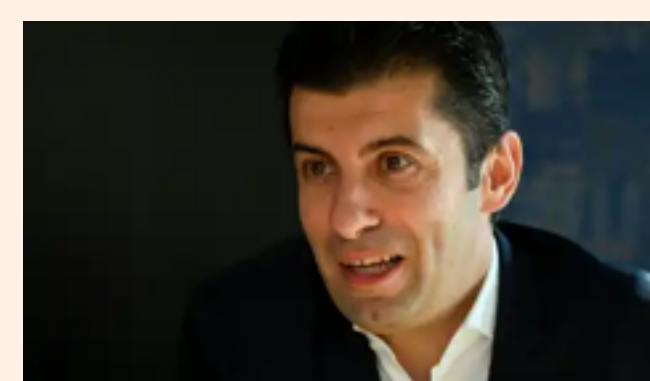
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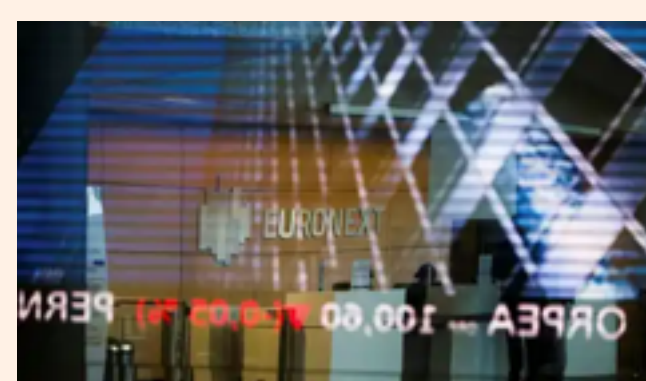
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