

# The New York Times

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April 19, 2011

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## Many Mediterranean Fish Species Threatened With Extinction, Report Says

By DAVID JOLLY

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PARIS — Mediterranean fish, including bluefin tuna, sea bass and hake, are in danger of extinction from overfishing, marine habitat degradation and pollution, according to a report on Tuesday from the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

In all, more than 40 species of Mediterranean fish are endangered, the organization said in its list of threatened species.

Almost half the species of Mediterranean sharks and rays — so-called cartilaginous fish — are facing extinction, the conservationist organization said, adding that they make up 14 of the 15 species it considers critically endangered. The 15th is a bony fish, the common goby or *Pomatoschistus microps*; the group says its population has declined about 80 percent in the past 10 years, mainly from damage to its habitat and incidental capture.

The organization called on governments to “reinforce fishing regulations, create new marine reserves, reduce pollution and review fishing quotas, in particular the number of captures allowed for threatened species.”

A species that the group lists as endangered, the Mediterranean population of Atlantic bluefin tuna, is one of the world’s most valuable fish, with adult specimens regularly selling for thousands of dollars on the Japanese market.

The lure of high prices has led to intensive overfishing that has reduced the eastern bluefin’s reproductive potential by 50 percent in the past 40

years, according to Kent Carpenter, global marine species assessment coordinator for the conservation group.

“The lack of compliance with current quotas, combined with widespread underreporting of the catch, may have undermined conservation efforts for this species in the Mediterranean,” Mr. Carpenter said, referring to what the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists last year described as an anything-goes black market in bluefin.

The bluefin has been the subject of several highly public conservation campaigns recently, including a push last year at a meeting in Doha, Qatar, to have it listed as a protected animal under the United Nations Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species.

Aggressive lobbying by Japan and a disjointed European front at the meeting — a position that was undermined by French and Spanish fishing interests — helped kill the proposal, but the issue does seem to have penetrated the public consciousness somewhat.

For example, in November 2009, Relais et Châteaux called on its member restaurants and hotels to stop serving bluefin tuna, and the Center for Biological Diversity in the United States has collected more than 30,000 signatures in its effort to create a consumption boycott.

But tradition dies hard. Like many other Japanese restaurants, Nobu, the global phenomenon that

began in New York under the chef Nobu Matsuhisa and whose founders include the actor Robert De Niro, continues to serve bluefin. The restaurant has become a *bête noire* to ocean conservationists, who would like to see Nobu set aside its origins to provide an example.

In opening its newest restaurant in Beijing recently, Nobu did make a small step toward acknowledging the predicament, telling the Spanish news agency Efe that it would source bluefin only from Spanish fish farms, never those caught on the open sea.

But that version of how the market operates is a little incomplete. The “farmed” bluefin (many conservationists prefer to call them “ranchered”) are not raised from eggs, but are instead caught as immature juveniles and fattened on fish meal in netted pens until they are large enough to be sold to the Japanese market. Some compare the practice to a farmer eating his seed corn, since the fish will never have had a chance to reproduce.

Nobu did not respond to requests for comment on Tuesday.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature made its report public as Maria Damanaki, the European Union’s fisheries commissioner, acknowledged on Tuesday that Europe had fallen short in regulating its fisheries, noting that “88 percent of European fish stocks, measured against maximum sustainable yield, are overexploited.”

In an address in Brussels, Ms. Damanaki promised that revisions of the bloc’s fisheries policy were coming.

“We have spoken to those who study the fish, those who catch them, those who process them, those who sell them, those who cook them and those who eat them,” Ms. Damanaki said. “We have analyzed their proposals for change without excluding a priori any option.”