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One More Shot at Protecting Bluefin Tuna

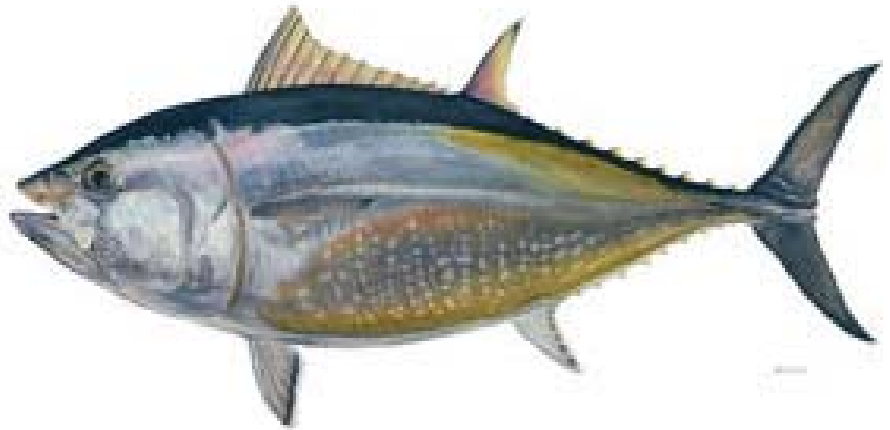
A lawsuit aims to halt overfishing for a popular, and highly imperiled, sushi fish.

By Dan Shapley

The Center for Biological Diversity has filed a lawsuit against the National Marine Fisheries Service challenging a new rule that it says will only increase overfishing for the species that conservationists say is already on the brink of destruction. The new rule would allow for "dramatic expansion" of commercial fishing on the U.S. East Coast, according to the lawsuit.

Western Atlantic bluefin tuna numbers have declined more than 80% since 1970, and yet the new rule would nearly double the number of fish that commercial ships could catch each day, according to the lawsuit.

"This rule enables fishermen to chase the remaining bluefin tuna down the Atlantic Coast on their way to reproduce in the Gulf of Mexico. At some point, the last bluefin tuna will



be caught, and there'll be no fishery left at all," said Catherine Kilduff, a staff attorney at the Center.

In June, federal officials listed the fish as a "species of special concern," a sort-of watch list for endangered species that falls short of formalizing any protections. Internationally, campaigners have sought to slow or stop the fishing for bluefin tuna, which can grow to 1,500 pounds and live 30 years, but which are coveted in sushi restaurants, particularly in Japan. A typical fish might sell for more than \$10,000, while one record-setting fish sold for nearly \$400,000.

There's a public bluefin tuna boycott that restaurants and consumers are using to bring attention to the issue, as both national and international fishing regulations have so far failed, in the eyes of conservationists, to acknowledge the overfishing problem and protect the species before it is too late.