

High Profile Scientists Blame EU Over Yellowfin Stock Collapse

A group of well-known fisheries scientists focused on marine conservation have written a letter to the EU Commissioner for Fisheries, Virginijus Sinkevičius. They took a hard stance against the overexploitation of yellowfin in the Indian Ocean and blamed IOTC for ineffective management of the stock and the EU for not stepping up to take responsibility for its actions to the detriment of the stock.

In their letter dated March 16, the scientists also took issue with some EU officials' statements. Specifically, those of Veronika Veits, Director of DG MARE for International Ocean Governance and Sustainable Fisheries who had stated that "the (yellowfin) stock is for the moment far from any danger of collapse." As *Atuna* discovered, this statement was made during correspondence between her and Charles Clover, Executive Director of Blue Marine Foundation, a UK non-profit.

In their missive, the 13 scientists emphasized that the stock is in real danger of collapse. "Furthermore, it is hard to see how your suggested 'low risk' of collapse, a highly undesirable endpoint, can justify current overfishing that sacrifices the productivity and revenue that would flow from a well-managed stock," read the letter.

The letter touched on a couple of other points made by Veits. She admitted that the objectives of the rebuilding plan by IOTC had not been fully achieved but stated that "we [the EU] remain confident though that after this initial 'teething' period, implementation of the measure will improve and catches will decrease."

The experts questioned this confidence regarding the matter and countered that "this RFMO [IOTC] has failed repeatedly across the years to sufficiently control fishing mortality of the species it is supposed to manage. Urgent action is justified now, rather than business as usual."

"The EU is by far the biggest player when it comes to fishing for tropical tuna in the Indian Ocean and has a legal and moral responsibility to ensure that this globally important stock receives the protection that it deserves," continued the letter.

This is not the first time that the [EU fleet](#), especially the Spanish, has been blamed for overfishing Indian Ocean yellowfin. *Atuna* had previously reported on this issue. However, Spanish authorities [denied](#) overexploiting yellowfin explaining that the alleged overfishing was based on a different calculation system and the country has a policy of full transparency.

The scientists also said that "the failure of the IOTC as an institution to take commensurate and effective action before now is one of the reasons why the poor track record of RFMOs, the IOTC in particular, will be highlighted at the meeting of the UN Conference on biodiversity protection beyond national jurisdiction. It is a failure that in our view the EU should take a lead to rectify, rather than hiding behind the interests of some of its largest commercial stakeholders."

The letter concluded that the EU should step up and take action by reducing the overall catches for this tuna by 25 percent.

Atuna contacted Blue Marine Foundation on its thoughts on the issue and Clover said the organization hopes "that this unified position from some of the world's leading experts will convince world leaders that urgent action is now required to save this stock. The coronavirus must not become a handy excuse for officials to put off making decisions that affect the health of our planet."

Scientists who signed this letter are: Callum Roberts Professor of Marine Conservation, University of York; Philippe Cury, Senior Scientist, Institute of Research for Development (IRD); Daniel Pauly, University Killam Professor and Principal Investigator, University of British Columbia; Dr Andrew Forrest, Chairman, Minderoo Foundation; Alan Friedlander, Chief Scientist, Pristine Seas, National Geographic Society; Ellen Pikitch, Endowed Professor, Stony Brook University; Hugh Possingham, Professor, The University of Queensland; Paolo Guidetti, Professor of Ecology, University of Côte d'Azur; Rashid Sumaila, Professor and Canada Research Chair, University of British Columbia; Douglas McCauley Associate Professor, University of California Santa Barbara; Boris Worm, Professor, Dalhousie University; Jessica Meeuwig, Professor and Director Centre for Marine Futures, University of Western Australia; and Dirk Zeller, Professor, University of Western Australia.