

Harsh Eyes on Big Tuna Eater Japan

– Calls Mount for Role in Curbing Global Haul –

Tuna is an essential ingredient for *sushi* – a Japanese specialty that is also very popular overseas. But the global fish-eating community is turning harsh eyes on Japan, the world's largest tuna-consuming nation, with two international tuna conservation groups hammering out substantial fishing quota cuts.

The Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna, which manages resources of the fish in the southern hemisphere, has agreed to almost halve Japan's annual fishing quota for southern bluefin tuna – highly popular in Japan for use in making quality *sashimi* (sliced raw fish) – for five years beginning in 2007 compared with its 2006 level. Amid rapid worldwide depletion of southern bluefin tuna stock due to overfishing, it came to light that Japanese

fishermen had been fishing southern bluefin tuna largely in excess of Japan's quota. The sharp quota reduction was intended as a punishment for overfishing. The International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas, which controls bluefin tuna resources in the Atlantic and Mediterranean waters, has also agreed to reduce an annual catch quota in the two regions by 20% in four years through 2010.

According to statistics of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, global tuna catches in 2004 were 2,065,000 tons. Japan topped the list with 251,000 tons, followed by Taiwan and Spain. In China, tuna consumption has recently become widespread, mainly in coastal areas which have been enjoying rapid economic

growth. While demand for tuna has been expanding on the back of global health-conscious trends, tuna stocks have been shrinking rapidly due to overfishing.

Against that backdrop, Japan has taken the lead to host a joint meeting of five international bodies in charge of tuna stock management in the western Japan city Kobe in January 2007. The international organizations will be discussing prevention of illegal fishing as well as measures to reduce tuna catches. They are set to adopt an action plan on issues that need to be dealt with from now on. As a major tuna consumer, Japan is required to assume great responsibility for preserving resources of the fish.

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