

COMISION INTERAMERICANA DEL ATUN TROPICAL INTER-AMERICAN TROPICAL TUNA COMMISSION

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Ref: 0432

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Senator John McCain
Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation

Dear Senator McCain,

I am writing to you on behalf of several internationally-recognized fisheries experts in respect to the June 12, 2003, hearing of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation regarding the status of global fishery resources. We are concerned that some of the scientific testimony may be based on a highly-questionable study, which should not be used as a credible source to form public policy.

Drs. Myers and Worm recently published an article in the journal Nature, which concluded that “large predatory fish biomass today is only about 10% of pre-industrial levels”. This article has been a basis for much of the recent publicized concern about the state of fishery resources. The analysis was based on a lack of understanding of the data and on unsupported or weakly supported implicit assumptions in the methodology. This has resulted in conclusions that are not credible. The fact that many fishery resources worldwide are over-utilized has been well documented by fishery research organizations nationally and internationally. However, publishing doomsday generalizations in popular science journals can undermine the serious efforts that are being made to rebuild these resources while maintaining viable fisheries.

Scientists from several internationally-recognized research and management organizations agree that the conclusions reached by Myers and Worm are grievously in error with respect to the status of global tuna stocks. The facts are that most tuna stocks are healthy and not depressed to the levels claimed by Myers and Worm. We attempted to generally address this issue in the pages of Nature (see attached letter), but Nature declined to publish our letter, even though, in their article, Myers and Worm had acknowledged most of these scientists for comments and suggestions. Nature, other popular scientific journals, news agencies, and funding organizations are negatively influencing the process of providing decision makers with best available scientific information.

We hope that you take the information we have provided into consideration when adopting any statements or policy regarding the status of fishery resources (see also the attached response by Hampton, Sibert, and Kleiber). We also request that our comments be entered into the hearing record.

Sincerely,

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