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Earth Island Statement Dolphin Safe and Tuna Sustainability

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Dolphin Safe and Tuna Sustainability

Earth Island Institute is the organization that maintains and verifies the international Dolphin Safe and Dolphin Friendly logos for canned tuna worldwide. We instigated the label in 1990 as the first seafood ecolabel. More than 460 tuna companies around the world, representing more than 95% of the world tuna market, subscribe to the non-encirclement Dolphin Safe standard.

Our purpose is to provide information regarding sustainable fishing methods and tuna markets, and address confusing or misleading claims made about tuna fishing operations.

** **Skipjack tuna**, the main target for canned tuna, are a relatively short-lived fish with a high reproductive rates and sustainable populations. No skipjack stocks are currently considered depleted or overfished.

** **Yellowfin tuna** stocks are generally healthy, although the best scientific information suggests that they may be overfished in the Eastern Tropical Pacific and at maximum utilization in the Western and Central Pacific.

** **Bigeye tuna stocks** are depleted in the Pacific Ocean (but not overexploited in the Indian and Atlantic Oceans). Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs), supported by the International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) including Earth Island Institute, support closures on purse seine fishing to prevent overfishing of bigeye and yellowfin tuna stocks.

** **Fishing Vessel Capacity**: The ISSF advocates a reduction in the number of tuna vessels, to again reduce worldwide pressure on tuna stocks and avoid over-fishing. Earth Island and other NGOs support this effort.

** **Sea Turtles**: Contrary to various information being circulated, catches of sea turtles in tuna purse seine nets is minimal, and most sea turtles are taken alive and can be released from the nets. Earth Island Institute first proposed to require live release of sea turtles from tuna nets in the mid-1990s, and most tuna RFMOs have now also adopted this restriction. As a result, very few sea turtles are harmed or die in tuna fishing operations using purse seine nets.

** **Shark bycatch** is still a problem with about 1% of purse seine bycatch being shark species. 70% of sharks taken are still alive and can be released, and Earth Island Dolphin Safe standards require live release and no shark finning. RFMOs have made some progress in restricting finning of sharks. Fishing closures also help relieve the impact on sharks. The ISSF has adopted new provisions to reduce shark bycatch and is conducting experiments with fishermen to release sharks alive from tuna nets. For more information: <http://issf-foundation.org/science/projects/bycatch-reduction/>

** **Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs)** It is our view that, in conjunction with restrictions to reduce overfishing and release live bycatch, FAD fishing can be considered a sustainable fishing method. We support studies, including those currently being conducted by the ISSF, to find ways to reduce bycatch when using FADs.

We support trial efforts of “FAD-free” tuna fishing operations so long as they are undertaken by companies that fully adhere to our non-encirclement Dolphin Safe policy. In order to verify such operations there needs to be clear chain-of-custody and monitoring. While FAD-free fishing methods result in less bycatch than current fishing on FADs, FAD-free is unlikely to provide the predominant portion of world market for canned tuna. FAD-free fishing has other environmental consequences, such as an increased carbon footprint due to the need for boats to travel longer distances to find schools of tuna and potential effects on fish species used as bait. FAD fishing, which should be closely regulated, is expected to continue to be a significant part of canned tuna supply.

** For further information on the Dolphin Safe tuna label, please go to: <http://www.DolphinSafe.org>