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Minister Cartwright
Ministry of Agriculture & Marine Resources
P. O. Box N 3028
Nassau, Bahamas

February 17th, 2010

**Open letter to the Hon. Lawrence Cartwright, Minister of Agriculture and Marine Resources
regarding netting tuna in The Bahamas**

Dear Minister Cartwright,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Bahamas Marine Mammal Research Organisation to express concern about a permit to use a purse-seine vessel to fish for yellow-fin tuna in The Bahamas. Due to the lack of current regulations to govern such fishing activities, I urge your Ministry to decline the requested fishing permit for this vessel and to immediately place a moratorium on large-scale pelagic fishing operations until regulations are in place to ensure the sustainable use of our pelagic marine resources.

Our country has a history of putting moratoriums in place when necessary to ensure sustainable use of our natural resources where regulations have been lacking. For example, applications for new captive dolphin facilities were declined until the Marine Mammal Protection Act was enacted in 2005 providing regulations for improved care of captive dolphins and protection of wild populations. Having reviewed our Agriculture and Fisheries and the Fisheries Resources (Jurisdiction and Conservation) Acts (both out-dated and in need of revision), it is clear that you have a legal obligation to follow this precedent and deny this permit application due to the complete lack of regulations and the possible unsustainable nature of this proposed operation.

Purse-seine fisheries are well documented to incidentally catch many non-target species during fishing operations. Many of these species carry high economic and social value in The Bahamas both for Bahamians and tourists, primarily through the sport-fishing industry. Tuna aggregate with other species so when a purse-seine net surrounds a tuna school, everything in the surface waters are caught as well, including juvenile and adult billfish, mahi mahi, jacks, triggerfish, and even pelagic dolphins. So, although current tuna harvests in the Atlantic are reported by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna (ICCAT) at near sustainable levels, there are concerns that the indiscriminate by-catch in purse-seine fishing may result in the collapse of pelagic

ecosystems on which many species depend, including our resident populations of dolphins and whales.

A recent article in *Science*¹ (February 12, 2010) outlines the importance of governance when facing issues relating to the development of fisheries and the increasing pressure on countries to ensure the sustainable use of the marine environment. Now is not the time for compromises or experimentation with new fishing methods – without adequate regulations, we simply have too much to lose. In closing, I leave you with the following:

"The right to fish carries with it the obligation to do so in a responsible manner so as to ensure effective conservation and management of the living aquatic resources." FAO's Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries.

I trust that you will make the right decision and deny this permit application. As a member of the United Nations FAO, we have global responsibility to do so.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Diane Claridge', written in a cursive style.

Diane Claridge
Executive Director
Bahamas Marine Mammal Research Organisation

¹Martin D. Smith *et al.* 2010. Sustainability and Global Seafood. *Science*. 327:784-786.