



MEDIA ADVISORY

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Industry, scientists and conservationists ask CITES to keep beluga caviar trade closed

Decision due at end of month

January 25, 2007 — This week, seafood industry professionals, renowned marine scientists and conservation groups from around the world have delivered personal letters and petitions to international trade officials urging them to continue the halt on the global beluga caviar trade. After reopening most of the wild caviar trade earlier this month, officials with the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) said they hope to make a decision on beluga caviar by the end of January.

Twenty-three scientists from the United States, Europe and Canada wrote to CITES: “Beluga populations continue to dwindle and only a long-term reprieve from fishing will serve to avert extinction. Given the dire status of beluga sturgeon, we call upon CITES to act with the best interest of the species in mind. This species simply cannot withstand commercial exploitation in its current condition and so we request that no quotas be granted for 2007.” Signatories included Daniel Pauly, University of British Columbia; Jane Lubchenco, Oregon State University and former president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science; and Rainer Froese, Leibniz-Institut für Meereswissenschaften.

In a group letter signed by six American chefs who asked for the trade ban to continue, the chefs said, “One only has to look at the fate overfishing has dealt sturgeon in other regions to predict what will happen to beluga sturgeon if fishing and trade continue. In the early 1900s in the United States, sturgeon were so plentiful in our waters that caviar was served as bar food. But we simply fished too many sturgeon too fast, and now the only sustainable American caviar is produced at aquaculture facilities. While farmed caviar is excellent in quality, we can’t imagine a world without wild caviar, and more importantly, without wild sturgeon. The Caspian Sea states and CITES hold the key to the survival of wild beluga sturgeon, and we urge you to do all in your power to save this imperiled species.” These chefs were Jacques Pépin, Rick Moonen of rm seafood (Las Vegas), Peter Hoffman of Savoy (NYC), H. Lamar Thomas of East-West Bistro (Atlanta), Paul Wade of El Monte Sagrado (Taos), and Jay A. Lippin of Mighty Joe

Young's Restaurant (White Plains).

A petition from 85 other seafood industry professionals said “drastic steps are needed if [beluga sturgeon] is to be brought back from the brink of extinction.” It asked CITES to support a long-term ban on beluga caviar adding, “this ban is necessary until beluga sturgeon show signs of recovery.” Signatories included fishermen, chefs, retailers, caterers, hotels, culinary schools and seafood distributors.

In a petition signed by 87 individuals from the global conservation community, CITES was asked to maintain the halt on trade of beluga caviar in 2007 “to reduce the overwhelming global demand on this species.” It continued: “We also urge CITES to encourage the Caspian nations to develop a recovery plan that includes a moratorium on beluga fishing, which would provide much-needed relief to the fish and to make enforcement easier in this region plagued by poaching.”

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For more information on the letters and petitions delivered to the CITES Secretariat this week, or for interviews on the impending decision on the beluga caviar trade, please contact Julia Roberson at +44-77-04-54-83-92 or (after Jan. 27) +1-828-734-6741, jroberson@seaweb.org or Shannon Crownover at +1-808-391-0281, shannon@seaweb.org.

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