



News Release

For more information, contact:

Stephen Dupont
Pocket Hercules
612-435-8315
stephen@pockethercules.com

American Restaurant Goers Send Clear Message to Restaurant Chefs: Take Marlin Off Your Menus

***Survey Findings: 78% of American Consumers Will Not Eat Marlin
Imperiled by Commercial Overfishing***

Fort Lauderdale, Fla. (March 16, 2009) – Restaurant chefs and seafood retailers take heed. American consumers are overwhelmingly alarmed about the dramatic decline in marlin and other billfish populations. According to a new national consumer survey, 78 percent say they will not order marlin or other billfish when visiting a restaurant that offers marlin on its menu. In fact, one-third of Americans won't even walk in the door of a restaurant that serves marlin.

Surprised? Three well-known marine conservation organizations that are leading a fight to save marlin and other billfish are not.

“When American consumers learn that some billfish populations are down 80 percent from their peak, and are seriously imperiled because of overharvesting by commercial fleets, the decision to stop the commercial harvest and sale of marlin and other billfish is a ‘no brainer,’” according to Jason Schratwieser, conservation director of the International Game Fish Association (IGFA). The IGFA, along with the National Coalition for Marine Conservation and The Billfish Foundation, have launched the Take Marlin Off The Menu Campaign (<http://www.takemarlinoffthemenue.org>) aimed at eliminating the commercial harvest and importation of billfish into the United States.

Marlin, sailfish, and spearfish are collectively called “billfish” because the long extension of their upper jawbone looks like a spear or bill. Marlin, the largest of the billfish species, have powerful muscular bodies, can weigh as much as a ton, and roam throughout the oceans feeding on smaller fish and keeping marine ecosystems in balance. As apex predators in the ocean, they serve the same role as lions, tigers and wolves on land.

The challenge facing the Take Marlin Off the Menu Campaign is drawing awareness to the plight of marlin and other billfish. Unfortunately, many Americans are not aware that marlin have suffered a dramatic population decline. According to a national Harris Interactive consumer survey of 2,078 consumers conducted on February 25, 2009, and sponsored by the Take Marlin Off the Menu Campaign, 93 percent of American consumers were unaware that the populations of marlin have declined 80 percent from their peak several decades ago, before the advent of large-scale commercial fishing worldwide.

When compared to large land predators, such as lions and tigers, 80 percent of American consumers surveyed find the killing of 80 percent of marlin fairly to extremely troubling. Knowing that marlin populations have declined excessively and are in peril, 70 percent of American consumers said they would have a negative impression of restaurants and seafood retailers that serve marlin.

When it comes to ordering marlin at a restaurant or purchasing it from a seafood retailer such as a grocery store or an independent seafood retailer, 78 percent of Americans said they would not eat marlin, and nearly a third surveyed said they would not walk into an establishment that serves marlin.

“American consumers are sending America’s chefs, restaurant owners and seafood retailers a clear message – Take Marlin Off The Menu,” said Ken Hinman, president of the National Coalition for Marine Conservation, a Leesburg, Va.-based group comprised of conservation-minded fishermen. “It’s time for restaurants and seafood retailers to stand up for sustainable seafood and go marlin-free.”

U.S. No. 1 Importer of Marlin

By taking the “Take Marlin Off The Menu” campaign (<http://www.takemarlinoffthemenu.org>) to the stomachs of American consumers, The International Game Fish Association (IGFA), the National Coalition for Marine Conservation (NMC) and The Billfish Foundation (TBF) are striving to take a bite out of commercial overfishing in the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, which accounts for more than 90% of the annual marlin mortality.

According to the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the United States earned the dubious distinction of being the No. 1 importer of marlin and sailfish for the table -- importing an average 1,260 metric tons of billfish (marlin, sailfish or spearfish), or the equivalent of about 12,000 billfish annually, at an average of 200 lbs. each,

between 2003 – 2006. Despite the fact that the United States has stiff bans on the commercial fishing and importation of marlin that roam the Atlantic Ocean, it does not have such a ban on marlin and other billfish that roam the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

Unhealthy Levels of Mercury

In addition to warning consumers about the perilous status of marlin and billfish populations, the Take Marlin Off The Menu Campaign also intends to alert chefs and consumers about the possible health risks associated with eating marlin.

"More than 70 percent of American consumers are unaware that marlin contain much higher than normal levels of mercury," said Ellen Peel, president of The Billfish Foundation, a Ft. Lauderdale-based non-profit exclusively dedicated to protecting billfish, "and unlike tuna these fish do not contain the high levels of selenium that may provide some protection against mercury poisoning."

"I would not recommend that pregnant women, and children and or even healthy males, for that matter, eat marlin and other billfish," Peel added. "I can't see why any restaurant or grocery store would dare to risk the health of women and children to make a buck on serving marlin."

Helping Restaurants

To assist restaurants and seafood retailers in going marlin free, the Take Marlin Off the Menu Campaign will promote all restaurants and seafood retailers that take the "Marlin Free Pledge." Averaging more than 19,000 visitors a month to its web site, <http://www.takemarlinoffthemenue.org>, the campaign will list any chefs and restaurants that are dedicated to not serving marlin and billfish, or seafood retailers that decide not to sell marlin. Because there are many sustainable alternatives to eating marlin, the web site features links to seafood guides that point American consumers to the restaurants and seafood retailers that sell sustainable species.

Restaurants and seafood retailers that are already "marlin free" or wish to be, can visit <http://www.takemarlinoffthemenue.org> and register their restaurant or store when they take the "Marlin Free Pledge."

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IGFA

The International Game Fish Association (IGFA), based in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., is a not-for-profit organization committed to the conservation of game fish and the promotion of responsible, ethical angling practices through science, education, rule making and record keeping. Founded in 1939, the IGFA is internationally known for maintaining and publishing world records for saltwater and freshwater catches, and for maintaining the world's most comprehensive fishing hall of fame and museum.

National Coalition for Marine Conservation

The National Coalition for Marine Conservation (NCMC), based in Leesburg, Va., was founded in 1973 by conservation-minded anglers and is dedicated exclusively to conserving ocean fish and their environment. NCMC works to prevent overfishing, reduce fish bycatch and protect habitat for a wide variety of ocean fish. The group specializes in identifying problems and finding solutions; educating the public; developing proactive conservation strategies; and networking with like-minded fishing and environmental organizations.

The Billfish Foundation

The Billfish Foundation (TBF) is a science-based, non-profit organization dedicated to conserving and enhancing billfish populations worldwide, working through research, education and advocacy. TBF's comprehensive network of members and supporters includes anglers, captains, mates, tournament directors, clubs, and sportfishing businesses. TBF provides support to regional groups by contributing expertise in science, socio-economics, education and fisheries policy to help find solutions to billfish threats so fishing opportunities will remain available.