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Price of bluefin tuna nosedives at Tokyo auction

By ELAINE KURTENBACH
January 5, 2014 6:03 AM



TOKYO (AP) — Sushi restaurateur Kiyoshi Kimura paid 7.36 million yen (about \$70,000) for a 507-pound (230-kilogram) bluefin tuna in the year's celebratory first auction at Tokyo's Tsukiji market on Sunday, just 5 percent of what he paid a year earlier despite signs that the species is in serious decline.

Kimura's record winning bid last year of 154.4 million yen for a 222-kilogram (489-pound) fish drew complaints that prices had soared way out of line, even for an auction that has always drawn high bids.

Kimura also set the previous record of 56.4 million yen at the 2012 auction.

The high prices don't necessarily reflect exceptionally high fish quality.

"I'm glad that the congratulatory price for this year's bid went back to being reasonable," said Kimura, whose Kiyomura Co. operates the popular Sushi-Zanmai restaurant chain.

Environmentalists say growing worldwide consumption of bluefin tuna is leading to its depletion, and that those in charge of managing fisheries for the species are failing to take responsible action to protect it.

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Japanese eat about 80 percent of all bluefin tuna caught worldwide, though demand is growing as others acquire a taste for the tender, pink and red flesh of the torpedo-shaped speedsters of the sea.

Stocks of all three bluefin species — the Pacific, Southern and Atlantic — have fallen over the past 15 years amid overfishing. Stocks of bluefin caught in the Atlantic and Mediterranean plunged by 60 percent between 1997 and 2007 due to rampant, often illegal, overfishing and lax quotas. Although there has been some improvement in recent years, experts say the outlook for the species is still fragile.



Sushi restaurateur Kiyoshi Kimura, second from left, cuts a 507-pound (230-kilogram) bluefin tuna h ...

According to a stock assessment released last year by the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific Ocean, the bluefin tuna population is at less than 4 percent of its unfished size.

"The population has effectively been decimated," said Amanda Nickson, director for global tuna conservation for The Pew Environment Group. "Over 90 percent of bluefin tuna are caught before they reach reproductive age. You have to wonder if this remotely sustainable."

So far, governments and management bodies have failed to take measures to protect the species that reflect the seriousness of its decline, she said.

There were 1,729 tuna sold in Sunday's first auction for 2014, according to data from the city government, down from 2,419 last year. The 32,000 yen (\$305) per kilogram paid for the top fish this year compares with 700,000 yen per kilogram last year.

Prices for bluefin tuna imported from other regions are much lower. A 189-kilogram (417-pound) farmed tuna imported from Spain sold for 662,000 yen (about \$6,400) on Sunday, or 3,500 yen (\$34) per kilogram, compared with a price of 4,800 yen (\$46) a kilogram for the same type of fish sold at last year's first auction.

"You have to wonder what the last fish is going to cost," Nickson said.

Associated Press writer Miki Toda contributed to this report.

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IF the bluefin is left alone for a predetermined time, there would plenty to go around for generations to come, but unfortunately these auction houses do not realize something, if the bluefin becomes extinct, then what are they going to auction off, they will eventually see a drop in their revenues.

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Blah Blah Blah 9 hours ago 36 2
Japan don't care about extinction of any species. Blue fin or Whales via "research" they will kill all they can due to the profit behind it over there. When are other countries going to lean on them before they empty the oceans. Whaling is illegal already but they get away with an 1100 a year quota under the guise of research. Same thing happens with sharks, their fins are cut off and the

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Trojan 5 hours ago 24 0
With all of the mercury and radiation that is in bluefin tuna that is caught off the coast of Japan, I'm surprised that these sushi chefs don't give off a bright glow.

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Dawn 2 hours ago 13 0
When the TRUTH comes out about Fukushima and TEPCO lying and it will come to light - no one will eat seafood. Funny we don't hear any media covering this.

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Steve 1 hour ago 9 0
The title and content of the article don't match. Nowhere does the article talk about the reason for the price decline. The ONLY reason price would fall would be if demand falls. The panic over contamination from Fukushima is one good explanation. Either way, the falling price is not necessarily a bad thing.

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NatureGirl 3 hours ago 12 3
70 thousand dollars... that's disgusting. It's disgusting that it doesn't seem to matter whether or not these fish are being fished into extinction either. It seems the Japanese just don't care as long as they're still being caught. Screw the consequences, they kill until there's nothing left to kill. They're doing it to the whales, why not these tuna as well. Time to start broadening the cricket farms,

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Have faith 1 hour ago 5 0
The fewer there are of something the more sought after that something becomes. Bluefin, Sword and certain other fish are getting vert scarce. Ivory demand has decimated Elephants and Rhinos. It is a hugh problem with little hope of being solved. Greed is hard to overcome.

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Anya J 8 hours ago 22 3
always amazes me the short sitedness of countries like Japan, that their over fishing will end many of the very species they depend on for food, and unlike the USA, they don't have a large land mass to grow their own food/meat to help them eat. They always pride themselves at being so far ahead of the curve to most of the world, then why haven't they figured out how to maybe at least, if

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Paul 14 hours ago 62 4
 I hope this message is read by the Prime Minister of Japan. "Last shall be first". As to the ocean for an island nation, sometimes it may seem like it belongs to you. But it does not. For the ocean's sake (and our common planetary home) look around and see a new day with new questions. Take the lead and quit the dolphin slaughter, hiding behind research and learning as an excuse for whale

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Joseph 1 hour ago 3 0
 they need to jail the fishermen until the depletion of the species is stabilized.

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