In December 2016, the United Nations voted to observe World Tuna Day.

**Why World Tuna Day?**

The purpose of World Tuna Day is:

- Raise awareness of the importance of tuna species in fisheries throughout the world
- To highlight the threats tuna face
- To share the work being done to conserve tuna populations

**About Tuna**

Tuna, with mackerels belong to the family *Scombridae*.

- 18 species occur in southern African waters.
- There are about 51 species in this family worldwide.

Tuna are among the fastest swimming fish.

- Their robust, torpedo-shaped bodies are adapted for high swimming speeds.
- They have grooves for their dorsal fins to fold into.

Tuna are migratory and some even cross entire oceans earning them the name “nomads of the sea”.

- Small scales
- Keels on either side of their strong tail fin to stabilise them
- Some species can swim at speeds of over 60 km/hour.
Like sharks and dolphins, tuna are top predators of the open ocean and eat fish, squid and crustaceans. Juvenile tunas are eaten by larger predators such as sharks, dolphins, and even other tunas. Many tuna species swim in large schools to gain protection from predators like sharks.

**ABOUT TUNA**

Tuna have remarkable adaptations that defy many of the characteristics of fish:

- **Fish are ectothermic** - relying on the surrounding environment to regulate their body temperature.
  - Some tuna species can maintain their body temperature several degrees above the ambient water temperature. This allows them to increase the efficiency of the swimming muscles, especially in deeper, cooler waters.

- **Almost all bony fish have swim bladders for buoyancy.**
  - Tuna lack swim bladders as their fast-forward movement keeps them afloat. If they stopped swimming, they would sink and eventually suffocate without the oxygen-carrying water passing over their gills.

- **Most fish have white flesh.**
  - The flesh of tuna is pink to dark red because of the high blood content.

- **They have well developed eyesight designed to pursue prey.**
  - Like raptors, their eyesight is both binocular and stereoscopic.

- **Like sharks and dolphins, tuna are top predators of the open ocean and eat fish, squid and crustaceans.**

- **They have high energy requirements and need to eat frequently.**

- **Anchovies, Sardine, Squid**
Some tuna grow very large. The largest Atlantic bluefin tuna ever caught was over 3 m in length and weighed over 670kg.

Almost the size of a full grown polar bear.

People have harvested tuna for more than 6000 years.

Top nations that harvest tuna.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korea</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The major fisheries are for canned tuna:

- Skipjack tuna
- Yellowfin tuna
- Longfin tuna
- Bigeye tuna
- Bluefin tuna

Canned tuna

and sushi/ sashimi

Sushi

Sashimi

Tuna and many other scombrids are extensively fished for human consumption, both in developed and developing countries.

They are important economically and are an important source of protein for many people.
According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, most tuna stocks are fully exploited (meaning there is no room for fishery expansion) and some are already overexploited (there is a risk of stock collapse).

Tuna species make up more than 8% of all globally traded seafood.

The market demand for tuna is very high which drives an overcapacity of tuna fishing fleets chasing the remaining populations of tuna.

The technology and effort to catch tuna have evolved faster than effective management and conservation efforts.

Approximately 4.6 million metric tonnes of tuna and tuna-like species are harvested each year. This is valued at over USD 12.2 billion.

Imagine a million African elephants!
Conservation status of the true tuna species (Genus Thunnus):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IUCN Red List (2011)</th>
<th>SASSI Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Southern bluefin tuna</td>
<td>Critically endangered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlantic bluefin tuna</td>
<td>Endangered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bigeye tuna</td>
<td>Vulnerable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellowfin tuna</td>
<td>Near threatened</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albacore/ Longfin tuna</td>
<td>Near threatened</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skipjack tuna</td>
<td>Least concern</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**WHAT CAN WE DO TO HELP TUNA?**

- Reduce demand for tuna products.
- Support scientists to promote science-based catch limits that do not allow overfishing.
- Recreational anglers must limit their catch not catch their limit!
- If you do eat tuna, ensure that it is a species that is not overexploited.
- Ask restaurants and seafood suppliers not to sell overexploited tuna species.