

U.S.-Morocco Cooperation

The United States established fisheries ties with Morocco in 1975, when a U.S. Regional Fisheries Attaché position was placed in Casablanca. These ties were formalized in 1983 through documents that called for cooperative exchanges between fisheries scientists at the NMFS Southeast Fisheries Science Center in Miami and the Institut Scientifique des Peche Maritimes in Casablanca. In 1996, a delegation from NMFS visited Morocco to encourage marine scientific exchanges and help establish a science-based fisheries management program similar to that of the United States. During that visit, both the United States and Morocco expressed interest in: (1) rebuilding and maintaining sustainable fisheries, (2) promoting the recovery of protected or endangered species, and (3) protecting and maintaining the health of coastal marine habitats.

Morocco and the United States share access to many commercially-important highly migratory fish stocks, such as North Atlantic swordfish, and are both members of the International Convention for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT). One issue of key concern has been a 2003 ICCAT Recommendation to prohibit the use of driftnets in Mediterranean large pelagic fisheries. NMFS offered technical assistance to support this transition in Morocco, including two workshops held in 2008 (in Tangier and Agadir) to demonstrate the use of circle hooks in longline fisheries, as well as safe handling and release techniques for sea turtles. After several years of delays during which it cited economic hardship, Morocco finalized domestic legislation in 2010 to prohibit the use of driftnets after December 31, 2011. To carry out this prohibition, Morocco has adopted regulatory changes, vessel conversion strategies, a government buyout for some vessel owners, and supplemental training programs for their fishermen.

In 2010, NMFS participated in an interagency ceremony formalizing a multi-year work plan for the U.S.-Morocco Working Group on Environmental Cooperation. (The U.S.-Morocco Joint Statement on Environmental Cooperation was signed in 2004, related to the U.S.-Morocco Free Trade Agreement.) In the context of this work plan, environmental cooperation between the United States and Morocco aims to support effective enforcement of environmental laws, to strengthen economic incentives for environmental protection, and to increase public awareness of environmental issues. The U.S. Department of State provided some funding to support the testing of alternative fishing gear types, recognizing eradication of driftnets as one element of the 2010-2012 work plan.

In 2012, a team of U.S. scientists traveled to Morocco to conduct workshops on the use of buoy gear as an alternative to driftnets. This gear has been used effectively in small-scale U.S fisheries for swordfish in the Florida Straits with minimal bycatch.

Representatives from the United States and Morocco have also exchanged information on best practices to support sustainable marine aquaculture. In 2012, a team of U.S. scientists from NOAA and Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute met with officials from the Moroccan Agency for Aquaculture Development (ANDA) and toured existing and potential aquaculture sites. A draft work plan was developed that focuses on 1) developing tools for coastal managers in Morocco to site and manage marine aquaculture in a sustainable manner, and 2) technology transfer to exchange information on coastal shellfish aquaculture techniques. NOAA and ANDA officials continue to seek funding partners for this work.

NOAA's Deputy Assistant for International Fisheries has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Department of Ocean Fisheries of the Ministry of Agriculture and Ocean Fisheries of the Kingdom of Morocco. The Kingdom of Morocco hosted a formal signing ceremony in Agadir in November 2012.

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