

North American Seafood Expo – 3/15/15

Remarks Prepared for Bruce Andrews, Deputy Secretary of Commerce

INTRODUCTION

Thank you, Dawn Martin, for the kind introduction.

I want to thank the Department of State for helping us co-lead the Presidential Task Force on IUU Fishing and Seafood Fraud.

I also have to acknowledge the White House's Council on Environmental Quality for providing important guidance and leadership; our 12 other partner agencies for their hard work and dedication in moving this process forward; and the many representatives of industry, foreign governments, and other stakeholders who have provided so much valuable feedback during this process.

This Administration is committed to building thriving coastal communities that can support good jobs now and in the future – and that starts with America's fisheries.

Across the country, from Key West to Anchorage, fishing drives coastal economies and puts food on the tables of families.

Furthermore, our seafood industry is a source of national pride. The United States is a global leader in sustainable seafood and effective management of our ocean resources, and we serve as a model for other domestic fishing industries around the world.

Operating under some of the most robust and transparent stewardship laws in the world, overfishing and overfished stocks are at historic lows. In 6 years, we have largely turned around the status of our nation's fisheries.

I know that our laws do not always make life easy for industry, but our country's investment in environmental stewardship is paying off. In 2013, U.S. fishermen landed 9.9 billion pounds of fish and shellfish, an increase of 245 million pounds over 2012.

But unfortunately, our fisheries and our progress are threatened, by the twin threats of illegal fishing and seafood fraud.

THREATS

Everyone in this room today knows that IUU fishing is problematic for many different reasons.

These ships take in fish without any regard to the sustainability of ocean ecosystems, undoing all the progress we have made to combat overfishing and rebuild depleted stocks.

The very nature of their black market fishing hurts the global economy, by flooding the market with illegally sourced fish and displacing law-abiding fisherman. And since they aren't required to file trip plans or carry transponders, IUU ships are convenient vehicles for human, drug, and arms trafficking.

All of these challenges are compounded by seafood fraud, which can mislead consumers – as well as the industry – and can occur at any point in the supply chain.

Together, IUU fishing and seafood fraud:

- Negatively affect our markets;
- Undermine the competitiveness of our seafood industry;
- Defraud buyers;

- Threaten the health and sustainability of global fisheries; and
- Compromise the economic stability of developing nations vulnerable to these criminal activities.

TASK FORCE AS SOLUTION

I wish I could say there is a simple solution to put a stop to these threats – but these issues require long-term collaboration, innovation, and investment to solve.

When President Obama announced the creation of a task force to combat IUU fishing and seafood fraud last summer, he gave federal agencies the mandate to tackle these complex challenges.

Under the leadership of my esteemed colleagues Kathy Sullivan and Under Secretary of State Cathy Novelli – along with representatives from 13 other federal agencies and offices – the Task Force worked hard to develop a comprehensive framework of integrated programs to combat pirate fishing and seafood fraud.

In December, the Task Force published 15 recommendations to level the playing field for legitimate fishers and others in the seafood industry.

On behalf of the Administration and the Task Force, I want to thank everyone who took the time to contribute their thoughts and expertise to the development of these recommendations.

ACTION PLAN ANNOUNCEMENT

Today, I am thrilled to announce that the Task Force is releasing a strategic blueprint to aggressively implement those recommendations.

The Action Plan outlines priority actions and timelines to:

- Work with our international partners;
- Strengthen enforcement globally;
- Forge and expand partnerships with state and local governments, industry, and NGOs; and
- Create a risk-based traceability program to track seafood from harvest to entry into U.S. commerce.

These actions are broad in scope and will require the full range of agency capabilities, capacity, and authorities that are captured in the Task Force membership.

ENFORCEMENT ACTIONS

Our plans start with enforcement. We will implement a strategy to optimize the collection, sharing, and analysis of information and resources to prevent IUU or fraudulently labeled seafood from entering the U.S. market by September of this year.

By December, we will implement recommended adjustments to U.S. tariff codes to properly identify seafood products in trade.

In addition, we are instructing joint federal/state enforcement operations to prioritize combating seafood fraud and the sale of IUU seafood products for and investigation and prosecution of cases in 2015.

PARTNERSHIPS & TRACEABILITY

The plan makes clear that successful implementation of the recommendations will require federal collaboration – as well as working with international partners, states, and interested stakeholders, like those in this room today.

We are planning to launch a public web portal to share updates about the implementation of this plan, so that you have access to the latest information on what the federal government is doing to tackle these challenges.

But more importantly, we want to hear from all of you about specific IUU fishing or seafood fraud concerns. To that end, we are planning to host an annual forum to solicit feedback from interested stakeholders.

We will also put in place an important new tool for enhancing our ability to keep illegally harvested fish out of the market, by tracking seafood from the time of harvest or production to the point that it enters the U.S. market.

Over the next 18 months, we will – with your help – design this system, by identifying, among other things, what information will need to be collected about seafood entering the U.S. market and how that information will be stored and shared among federal officials.

The system will be phased in over time to allow for its orderly implementation. We will begin with the species most at risk of IUU fishing or seafood fraud.

Once this risk based approach has been in place for one year, the Task Force will then look at expanding the program to all seafood entering the U.S. market.

In order to provide oversight for the work, the National Ocean Council is establishing a standing IUU/Seafood Fraud subcommittee to take the place of the Task Force. This subcommittee – which will be co-chaired by NOAA and the Department of State – will include all of the current members of the Task Force, and may incorporate other agencies as necessary.

INTERNATIONAL ACTIONS

Recognizing that we need to engage far beyond our borders to effectively address the problems of IUU fishing and seafood fraud, the Action Plan enhances our country's ability to work with other nations to address these issues.

We will work with Congress to ratify the Port State Measures Agreement and get at least 14 additional foreign countries to sign on, so that it can enter into force by the end of 2015.

As a member of the Regional Fisheries Management Organizations, we will advance best practices for the monitoring, control, and surveillance of international fisheries, along with the implementation of port state controls and the monitoring of compliance with the rules of these RFMOs.

TPP

The action plan also supports the United States' high ambitions for environment provisions in the Trans-Pacific Partnership, or TPP – a comprehensive, high-standard trade agreement between 12 countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

TPP represents a unique opportunity to tackle issues related to marine fisheries. Four of the top 15 global producers of marine fisheries products by volume are party to the agreement, and the other countries involved are significant traders as well.

The United States is seeking groundbreaking disciplines on harmful fisheries subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, potentially leading the way for a WTO multilateral agreement on fisheries subsidies

In regards to IUU fishing, we have proposed stand-alone obligations to support measures being developed or implemented through relevant regional fisheries management organizations and other arrangements in the region, such as catch documentation schemes and port State measures.

We're close to the finish line for TPP negotiations, and the end is in sight. To get us there, the entire Administration is engaged in an all-out push to persuade the public that trade agreements like TPP will mean more jobs, more customers, and more growth for our businesses and economy.

Secretary Pritzker and I have traveled all over the country, meeting with Members of Congress, business leaders, and other stakeholders. Everywhere we go, we deliver the same message: that TPP is essential to ensuring fairness for our businesses and industries, to upholding our values worldwide, and to advancing our global leadership.

CONCLUSION

Our efforts to combat IUU and seafood fraud are ultimately about the same thing:

- Our seafood industry must operate on fair terms, with a level playing field for legitimate fishermen and businesses;
- The seafood that enters our market must be consistent with our values of environmental sustainability; and
- The U.S. must embrace its role as a global leader in helping set the rules of the road for fisheries around the world.

Over the last seven years, the United States has made enormous progress in ensuring our nation's fisheries will continue to be productive by largely ending overfishing in domestic waters and rebuilding a record number of depleted stocks.

Now is the time to take the next step and protect our seafood industry from IUU fishing and seafood fraud.

I am confident that, with the steps outlined in our Action Plan, we will make progress toward building sustainable fisheries and guaranteeing that U.S. fishing fleets remain competitive in the global economy.

Working together, across the public and private sector, we can ensure that America's fishing industry remains the heart and soul of coastal communities across the country for decades to come.

Thank you.