

Course of Action to Promote International Agreements that Address the Need to Reduce Sea Turtle Bycatch in Foreign Longline Fisheries

General

1. The United States recognizes the critical need to reduce incidental capture of marine turtles in longline fisheries, to evaluate other sources of fishing mortality, and to take appropriate action to minimize turtle bycatch in international fisheries.
2. The United States has taken steps to quantify marine turtle bycatch and to seek solutions to reduce the international problem of incidental capture of marine turtles. The United States supports the sharing of information on the incidental capture of sea turtles in all fishing gear. The United States recognizes data collection on marine turtle bycatch is critically important to understand the impacts these activities may have on turtle populations. The United States hopes that by sharing its domestic information, it will encourage and support existing bilateral efforts as well as facilitate new regional and global efforts to collect and share turtle bycatch data and encourage cooperative research.
3. The United States is proceeding to identify and evaluate gear and/or fishing technique modifications that may serve as an alternative to fishery closures to reduce sea turtle bycatch in longline fisheries and should request and encourage the international cooperation necessary to achieve this goal.

Global

4. The United States intends to provide a summary report to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) for distribution to FAO members on the bycatch of marine turtles in U.S. longline fisheries and the findings of its research as well as recommendations to address the issue.¹
5. At the Twenty-Fourth Session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI), the United States distributed a concept paper for an international technical experts' meeting to evaluate existing information on turtle bycatch, to facilitate and standardize collection of data from those fisheries that are likely to interact with marine turtles, to exchange information on experimentation with longline gear relative to turtles and target species, and to identify and consider solutions to reduce turtle bycatch. There were, however, differing views on how to address the conservation problems of sea turtles. COFI agreed that an international technical meeting could be useful despite the lack of agreement on the specific scope of that meeting. The United States concluded that the international technical experts' meeting would be most productive if focused on problems associated with a specific geartype. A prospectus for a technical workshop to address longline bycatch of marine turtles is included in this

¹The United States provided this summary to the Twenty-fifth Session of the Committee on Fisheries, Rome, February 24-28, 2003.

Report to Congress.² However, this does not preclude the need for other gear-specific international workshops in the future.

Regional

6. The United States will initiate efforts through regional fishery management organizations and other regional fisheries and conservation bodies, as appropriate, e.g., the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas, the Asia Pacific Fisheries Commission, and the mechanisms to be established under the Inter-American Convention and the Convention on the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific, to call attention to the international problem of sea turtle bycatch in fisheries, particularly longline fisheries, and promote international cooperative efforts to collect information on the incidence of sea turtle bycatch and gear and/or fishing technique modifications that may ameliorate the problem. We will promote our technical workshop as the forum that should receive and consider such information. The United States will also pursue potential co-sponsors for the technical workshop.

Bilateral

7. The United States will use relevant bilateral relationships to encourage the collection and sharing of information and the eventual implementation of means of reducing sea turtle bycatch in fisheries, particularly longline fisheries. For example, we can follow up on Mexico's commitment to share observer data from its Pacific swordfish and shark fisheries and on Chile's 1999 undertaking to collect information on bycatch of sea turtle in its swordfish fishery. This topic will also be suggested for the agendas of bilateral meetings with Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Canada, the European Community, and other nations with fisheries of concern.

8. The United States will demarche any flag states with a significant longline fleet, and Taiwan, to emphasize the international nature of this problem, to describe the steps the United States is taking to address it, and to request information relative to sea turtle bycatch in longline fishing according to a specification that will be developed. We should also make a similar demarche to the Executive Secretaries (or equivalent) of regional fisheries management organizations or arrangements in whose area of operation longline fishing occurs to request any relevant information held by those organizations.

²The Technical Workshop was held in Seattle, February 2003.