

International Dolphin Conservation Program

Amendments to the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) from 1984 to 1992 resulted in greatly reduced annual dolphin bycatch by U.S. vessels participating in the tuna purse seine fishery in the eastern tropical Pacific Ocean (ETP). However, foreign participation in the ETP fishery continued to increase; mortality was managed under the voluntary International Dolphin Conservation Program (IDCP) supported by the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC). Since 1992, nations participating in the fishery have worked to negotiate more substantial international conservation measures for dolphins and tuna in the ETP.

- **La Jolla Agreement:** In the fall of 1992, the nations convened at the annual meeting of the IATTC signed the La Jolla Agreement. The La Jolla Agreement placed voluntary limits on the number of dolphin that could be incidentally killed in the tuna purse seine fishery in the ETP and lowered the maximum each year over seven years, with a goal of eliminating dolphin deaths in the fishery.
- **Panama Declaration:** Because the multi-nation yellowfin tuna fleet fishes in international waters, a binding international agreement is key to successfully protecting dolphins. The United States and the governments of Belize, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, France, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, and Spain, whose vessels fish for tuna in the ETP or which have coastlines bordering the ETP, came together again in 1995 and negotiated the Panama Declaration. The signing nations agreed that, if the United States changed the MMPA to allow ETP yellowfin to be imported from countries participating in the international dolphin conservation program, they would enter into a binding international agreement to continue long-term dolphin protection.
- **Agreement on the International Dolphin Conservation Program:** The countries participating in the Agreement on the IDCP successfully negotiated the international agreement in 1998, which is a legally binding instrument for dolphin conservation and ecosystem management in the ETP. The agreement became effective on February 15, 1999, when Mexico, the fourth country, ratified. The United States, Panama, Ecuador, Mexico, El Salvador, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Honduras, Peru, and Guatemala are the countries that have ratified, to date. On March 3, 1999, the Secretary of State certified to Congress that the Agreement on the IDCP was in force, and as a result key provisions of the 1997 International Dolphin Conservation Program Act went into effect.

Through the IDCP, observed dolphin deaths have been cut from 133,000 in 1986 to fewer than 2,000 annually since 1998.