



3.3 Ban on Imports

Trade Restrictive Recommendations adopted in 2002

In 2002, ICCAT recommended bigeye tuna trade restrictions against Bolivia and bigeye tuna, swordfish, and bluefin tuna trade restrictions against Sierra Leone pursuant to its 1998 unregulated and unreported catches resolution. ICCAT also recommended import prohibitions on bigeye tuna against St. Vincent and the Grenadines to take effect on Jan. 1, 2004, unless ICCAT decides at its 2003 meeting that this measure would be unnecessary based on documentary evidence. Furthermore, ICCAT recommended lifting import prohibitions on bluefin tuna, swordfish, and bigeye from Belize, to be effective 1 January 2004, unless ICCAT decides at its 2003 meeting that Belize has not completed necessary actions to bring its fishing practices for those species into conformity with ICCAT conservation and management measures on the basis of documentary evidence. ICCAT also recommended lifting the bigeye tuna import trade restriction against Honduras. The United States is developing regulations to implement these measures.

Statistical Documentation Programs

The United States' Bluefin Tuna Statistical Document program has been in place since the 1990s. As required under the program, the United States submits reports to ICCAT twice yearly providing information on the implementation of the program. In 2001, ICCAT recommended that all bigeye tuna and swordfish be accompanied by an ICCAT Bigeye Tuna or Swordfish Statistical Document, respectively, when those species are imported into the territory of a Contracting Party. The United States already has a domestic documentation program for swordfish called the Certificate of Eligibility. Either the domestic COE form or the ICCAT Swordfish Statistical Document meet the domestic reporting requirements. The United States is developing regulations to implement these measures.

3.4 Observer Programs

The U.S. observer program currently meets two main objectives: monitoring of interactions between fishing gear and protected species (marine mammals, sea turtles, and to a lesser degree, sea birds), and monitoring of fishing effort and catch (estimation of total landings of target species and/or bycatch of non-target or prohibited species). An overview of observer programs in the United States can be found at our website at: <http://www.st.nmfs.gov/st1/nop/>. Click on the bullets under "About US" for info about both the National Observer Program, which is a coordinating office for NMFS observer programs in our headquarters outside of Washington, DC, and the Regional Programs. Observers for U.S. vessels in ICCAT fisheries are deployed from Miami, Florida and Panama City, Florida.

3.5 Vessel Monitoring

Recommendation Concerning a Vessel Monitoring System Pilot Program (Rec 97-12)

The United States adopted fleet-wide VMS requirements in the Atlantic pelagic longline fishery in May 1999, but was subsequently sued by an industry group. By order dated September 25, 2000, the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia prevented any immediate implementation of VMS in the Atlantic pelagic longline fishery, and instructed the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to “undertake further consideration of the scope of the [VMS] requirements in light of any attendant relevant conservation benefits.” Pursuant to that order, NMFS conducted an analysis of HMS pelagic longline vessels to determine whether the VMS requirement could be restricted to a subset of HMS pelagic longline vessels. On October 15, 2002, the District Court for the District of Columbia issued a final order upholding the VMS regulation. The United States implemented the fleet-wide VMS requirement in the Atlantic pelagic longline fishery effective September 1, 2003.

3.6 Measures to Ensure Effectiveness of ICCAT Conservation and Management Measures and to Prohibit Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing

The United States is committed to full participation in ICCAT’s efforts to prohibit Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported (IUU) fishing in the Convention Area. The United States government is actively developing a national plan of action (NPOA) to combat IUU, consistent with the International Plan of Action that was recently adopted by the FAO. Possible regulatory or legislative actions will be considered in the context of NPOA development.

Management Standard for the Large-Scale Tuna Longline Fishery

In 2001, ICCAT resolved that minimum management standards should be established for issuance of fishing licenses to tuna longline vessels greater than 24 meters in overall length and that an annual report should be submitted to ICCAT using a specific format. The United States issued permits to 17 tuna longline vessels over 24 meters in overall length. The U.S. submission is provided in the Appendix on page 7.

3.7 Other Recommendations

Resolution on Seabirds (2002)

This resolution encourages ICCAT parties to inform the SCRS and the Commission of the status of their National Plans of Action for Reducing Incidental Catches of Seabirds in Longline Fisheries (NPOA-Seabirds) and to voluntarily submit all available information on interactions with seabirds, including incidental catches in all fisheries under the purview of ICCAT, to the SCRS. The United States submitted an update on the implementation of its NPOA-Seabirds and observer data on seabird interactions in the

Appendix on page 33.

Resolution on Atlantic Sharks (2001)

This resolution calls for the submission of catch and effort data for porbeagle, shortfin mako, and blue sharks; encourages the release of live sharks to the extent possible; encourages the minimization of waste and discards in accordance with the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries; and calls for voluntary agreements not to increase fishing targeting Atlantic porbeagle, shortfin mako, and blue sharks until an assessment can be conducted. The United States already submits catch and effort data for all sharks caught incidentally in ICCAT-managed fisheries and has catch limits in place for Atlantic porbeagle, shortfin mako, and blue sharks. In 2002, pursuant to the 2000 Shark Finning Prohibition Act, the United States banned the practice of finning nationwide (67 FR 6194, February 11, 2002), which will reduce waste associated with finning. Additionally, the United States adopted a National Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks in February 2001, consistent with the International Plan of Action for Sharks, which calls for management measures to reduce waste to the extent practicable and to protect vulnerable life history stages, such as juveniles.

Resolution on Improving Recreational Fishery Statistics (Rec 99-13)

Recreational landings are estimated through a combination of tournament surveys (the Recreational Billfish Survey), the Large Pelagic Survey (LPS), the Marine Recreational Fishing Statistics Survey (MRFSS), and state landings data. Final regulations adopted in 1999 require selected HMS charter/headboat vessels that do not already do so to complete a logbook; implementation of this requirement is underway. In 1999, NMFS mandated the registration of all recreational tournaments for Atlantic highly migratory species. All tournaments are now required to submit landing reports, if selected. Currently, 100% of billfish tournaments are selected for reporting. The United States finalized regulations effective in March 2003 that implemented a mandatory recreational landings self-reporting system for Atlantic blue and white marlin, west Atlantic sailfish, and North Atlantic swordfish (68 FR 711). The United States is also in rulemaking to make recreational reporting requirements consistent across all tunas, billfish, and swordfish (68 FR 54410); implementation of this requirement is underway.

Recommendation Concerning Registration and Exchange of Information on Vessels Fishing for Tunas and Tuna-Like Species in the Convention Area (2000)

The United States has submitted the list of vessels required pursuant to this recommendation to the Secretariat.

U.S. Swordfish Certificate of Eligibility Program

A summary of data collected through this program in 2002 is provided in the Appendix, page 6.

U.S. Enforcement Actions

A summary of actions taken in ICCAT fisheries is provided in the Appendix, page 8.

Recent U.S. management actions for Atlantic highly migratory species can be found online at:
<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/>

Federal Register notices containing the full text of proposed and final regulations can be found at:
http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/aces/aces140.html.

4. OTHER ACTIVITIES

U.S. Research on Gear Modification to Reduce Sea Turtle Bycatch

Preliminary results from U.S. research in the Atlantic Ocean have shown that larger circle hooks significantly reduce turtle catches in the pelagic longline fishery (e.g. with mackerel bait, the number of loggerhead turtles caught was reduced by 65%). Unlike “J” hooks, which are often swallowed, circle hooks often become anchored in the mouth, and therefore hook extraction is easier and safer for sea turtles. There are a number of devices available to remove hooks and line from turtles caught on pelagic longlines. Long handled LaForce line cutters and long handled Aquatic Release Corporation dehookers are used to remove gear from turtles too large to be boated. The Epperly Biopsy Pole is used with a stainless steel corer to take tissue samples for genetics. Short handled de-hookers used to remove hooks from animals that are boated. Miscellaneous tools have been developed to remove line, hooks, or the barb or eye of hooks on boated turtles. A dip net is used to bring small (<50 kg) turtles aboard. Mouth openers and gags used on boated turtles to allow access to internal hooks. U.S. gear experts presented this bycatch reduction technology to the international fishing community and resource managers at the International Fisheries Forum in Honolulu (2002), and at the NOAA-sponsored International Technical Expert Workshop on Marine Turtle Bycatch, in Seattle, WA (2003). As new technological solutions are discovered, we will continue to help export these technologies to other fishing nations.