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**INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION ACTS ON CONSERVATION, ILLEGAL FISHING  
AND PROMOTES SEA TURTLE DATA COLLECTION**

The United States delegation to the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) helped develop agreements aimed at promoting the conservation and rebuilding of transboundary fish stocks critical to U.S. fishermen. ICCAT is an international fishery management organization with 37 member nations, including the United States.

Among the many proposals adopted in Ireland at the 18<sup>th</sup> annual ICCAT meeting were an agreement concerning the application of trade restrictive measures and a binding recommendation with additional measures to fight illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing.

The trade resolution defines a comprehensive approach to the application of trade restrictive measures against countries that have not abided by ICCAT's conservation and management measures.

"The fair and consistent application of trade sanctions to stop illegal and non-compliant fishing will bolster our ability to manage these fish stocks successfully," said Dr. William T. Hogarth, chief U.S. ICCAT Commissioner and director of the U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries). Hogarth noted that illegal and non-compliant fishermen make their profits at the expense of law-abiding American fishermen and thwart ICCAT's efforts to rebuild internationally shared fish stocks.

The recommendation on illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing requires all parties to take measures, consistent with their rights and obligations under international law, to prohibit landings, transshipments or caging of ICCAT species from vessels that are engaging in illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing. Hogarth stated, "ICCAT's latest actions send a strong message to all fishing nations that they must gain control of their flag vessels, because illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing will no longer be profitable."

Hogarth said that he appreciated the support of the U.S. Congress on this and other ICCAT issues. He noted that Congressman Wayne Gilchrest (R-MD), Chairman of The House Subcommittee On Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans attended a portion of the meeting to help bolster the U.S. positions.

Trade sanctions were ended against Belize and St. Vincent, which have made efforts to control their vessel registries and implement monitoring and control systems on their fishing activities. Sanctions for Bolivia, Cambodia and Sierra Leone will remain in effect, and Georgia will be added, due to evidence of continued non-compliance with ICCAT conservation measures. The Commission identified several countries that have recently become involved in Atlantic pelagic fisheries, including Costa Rica, Cuba and Togo. These countries face possible sanctions if they do not comply with the conservation measures.

Building a framework for strict application of compliance rules has been a high priority for the United States. Several parties recently not in compliance with conservation and management measures described regulations they have implemented to comply.

The Commission also took steps to improve data reporting and monitoring systems. New measures were adopted to control caging operations that are part of the rapid expansion of the bluefin tuna farming in the Mediterranean, and to improve the ICCAT statistical document program, which tracks the origin and trade of bluefin, swordfish and bigeye tuna. Parties agreed to a proposal from the United States to establish a joint fund for developing countries to improve their data collection systems. International conservation measures rely on accurate fishery information from all nations participating in ICCAT fisheries.

ICCAT took action that encourages all parties to provide information on sea turtle interactions, including the bycatch of sea turtles. Parties agreed to share all available information on technical measures to reduce the incidental capture of sea turtles, and to ensure the safe handling of turtles that are released.

ICCAT also resolved to have its scientific body develop standardized data collection and reporting methods to assess the problem of sea turtle bycatch.

“This action will help us determine the significance of fishery impacts on sea turtle populations around the world, while educating fishermen from every nation about the importance of safe handling and live release of turtles,” Hogarth said. He noted that the United States has been promoting the sea turtle resolution for over two years.

Research and education about sea turtle conservation has been a longtime priority for the United States. NOAA Fisheries is conducting cooperative research with industry in the North Atlantic on methods to reduce bycatch of sea turtles in longline vessels and has been sharing this information with the international community.

NOAA’s National Marine Fisheries Service, part of the U.S. Commerce Department, is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation’s living marine resources through scientific research, management, enforcement, and the conservation of marine mammals and other protected marine species and their habitat.

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On the Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

NOAA Fisheries: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>