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**NOAA/U.S. DELEGATION TO HOST INTERNATIONAL FISHERIES COMMISSION
IN NEW ORLEANS**

Negotiations will Focus on Atlantic Bluefin Tuna, Sharks and Compliance

Next week, the United States will host delegates from 62 fishing nations to plan for the future conservation and fisheries management of economically and ecologically important fish species. The International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas is tasked with oversight of managing Atlantic tunas and other trans-boundary species that are shared by many fishing nations, such as swordfish, marlins and sailfish. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce, leads the U.S. delegation.

“The United States is pleased to host this important international fisheries management commission for the first time and we welcome the opportunity to work with our international partners,” said retired Navy Vice Adm. Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Ph.D., under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator. “With strong support from the United States, the commission members are working together to manage species that are of great economic importance to recreational and commercial fishermen.”

The meeting will take place in New Orleans at the Fairmont Hotel, 123 Baronne Street, from Nov. 15-21, 2004. Commission deliberations are closed to the general public, however the public is welcome to attend the opening session on Monday, Nov. 15 at 9:00 a.m. to hear keynote addresses by Sen. John Breaux and Lautenbacher. Immediately following, NOAA will host a news conference for the media at 10:15 a.m. to outline a U.S. proposal for the future of shark management.

“The United States has pursued an aggressive plan through ICCAT to develop comprehensive strategies for managing Atlantic fisheries with other nations,” said William Hogarth, director of NOAA’s National Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. government commissioner to ICCAT. “Our main objectives this year include advocating for better science and management for bluefin tuna, seeking improved compliance with ICCAT’s rules such as data reporting, and getting agreement for a broader, more integrated approach to shark management.”

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Hogarth said he also will continue efforts within ICCAT to find ways to reduce unintentional catches of sea birds and turtles in international commercial fisheries. The United States has made great strides in reducing bycatch in international fleets through gear development and research, but more work remains to be done. Other areas of concern for the United States are clamping down on illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and setting the stage to adopt effort and capacity controls for ICCAT fisheries.

The commission is set to discuss a wide range of international fishery management issues and may take final action on key measures. During deliberation, the United States will push for several measures on bluefin tuna. Specifically, the United States is concerned with continued overfishing of the Eastern stock of bluefin tuna, which threatens sustainability of the species and reduces fishing opportunities for other countries. The recent expansion of bluefin tuna farming in the Mediterranean also may be undermining the international rebuilding program for the Western management unit. The United States firmly believes that the scientific data demonstrates that a considerable amount of stock mixing of Eastern and Western bluefin tuna is occurring. This information supports the need for integrated management of the Eastern and Western stocks.

The United States also will unveil a proposal to improve international collaboration for management of Atlantic sharks. Although shark fisheries in the United States are highly regulated, some populations continue to decline. There is a lack of a coordinated approach at the international level to share scientific information and carry out rebuilding plans. Since fishermen in the United States suffer the consequence of shark overfishing elsewhere in the world, getting international agreement on this plan is critical for the future of sharks in the Atlantic.

NOAA Fisheries will issue a post-meeting news release on Monday, Nov. 22 to summarize actions taken at the meeting. It will be posted on the agency's Web site, www.nmfs.noaa.gov

NOAA Fisheries is dedicated to providing and preserving the nation's living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management, and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources.

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

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