



NOAA

**NATIONAL OCEANIC AND
ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION**
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE



Contact: Connie Barclay
301-713-2370

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 27, 2010

United States Leads Push for Strong Measures to Protect Sharks and Sea Turtles
ICCAT Takes More Steps for Bluefin Tuna Conservation

The 17th special meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) ended today with successes in some important areas and room for improvement in others. The United States met many of its important objectives this year, including the adoption of measures to address the bycatch of endangered sea turtles, conservation measures for shortfin mako sharks, a recommendation on scientific observer programs, and continued progress toward a more robust compliance system.

In adopting these measures, ICCAT was acting in accordance with scientific advice and building on many steps already taken by American fishermen. The United States also successfully maintained its 2010 quota level for North Atlantic swordfish, a fully rebuilt stock that is important for U.S. commercial and recreational fisheries from New England to Florida.

The United States was disappointed that in other areas ICCAT did not fully act in accordance with the scientific advice of the ICCAT scientific body. For example, nations only agreed to minor quota reductions for bluefin tuna fisheries, and didn't take the precautionary steps necessary to accelerate stock growth. The levels of catch approved in the eastern and western stocks are expected to support some improvement in the eastern and western stocks, although the United States had hoped to reduce catch levels to improve the health of the resource for the long-term benefit of U.S. fishermen. U.S. fishermen have sacrificed significantly to begin the rebuilding of this stock. The United States believes that it is important that ICCAT act to ensure that future fishing does not result in overfishing that undoes these successes.

"The United States pushed hard for parties to adopt science-based management measures for bluefin tuna and other species, applying a precautionary approach where needed and taking into account impacts to the ecosystem," said Jane Lubchenco, Ph.D., the U.S. under secretary for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator. "While we met with mixed success at this meeting, we will continue to push for sustainable management to support the long-term stability of jobs associated with the recreational and commercial fishing industries."

The final measure for eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean bluefin tuna stock reduces the quota from 13,500 metric tons to 12,900 metric tons and improves monitoring and control of the fishery through new reporting requirements, measures that seek to reduce overcapacity and rationalize the fishery, and establishment of a more robust compliance program. Underreporting and illegal fishing has been a persistent problem in this fishery, although there have been significant improvements in the last few years. The quota for the western Atlantic stock (which the U.S. fishes on) was reduced from 1,800 metric tons to 1,750 metric tons.

“The United States succeeded in protecting the gains in conservation we achieved last year while making significant progress in other areas,” said Russell F. Smith, III, Deputy Assistant Secretary for international fisheries, who led the U.S. negotiating team, along with Ellen Peel, U.S. recreational fisheries commissioner, and Randi Parks Thomas, U.S. commercial industry commissioner.

ICCAT members adopted a U.S. proposal, co-sponsored by ten other countries, to reduce the impact of ICCAT fisheries on sea turtles through more responsible fishing practices and mandate reporting of interactions with sea turtles in ICCAT fisheries. Parties also agreed to prohibit retention of the oceanic whitetip shark, a species considered to be highly vulnerable to fishing pressure. Retention of hammerhead sharks that are caught in association with ICCAT fisheries will also be prohibited, with a limited exception for developing coastal states that retain hammerheads for food. Conservation measures for bigeye tuna, blue marlin and white marlin were extended through next year.

Finally, the parties agreed to develop an improved system for tracking Atlantic bluefin tuna to combat illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing. An electronic system will require detailed documentation of bluefin tuna beginning at the point of landing, and following the product through international trade. This will enable verification in near real-time and reduce the burden on the seafood industry that is associated with a paper-based system.