

Canada-United States Pacific Albacore Tuna Treaty Discussion

An initial consultation with Canada on the next steps for the U.S.-Canada Albacore Treaty was held in Vancouver, British Columbia on January 21, 2014. The meeting was intended to present an exchange of views on the idea of a multi-year regime for 2014 and beyond with an understanding that the United States would not pursue a future reciprocal access regime after that. There was also a review of the 2013 season's enforcement actions, crowding issues and port access needs. Areas of bilateral cooperation were identified and data was exchanged.

The United States delegation was lead by U.S. Department of State with representatives from NOAA Fisheries, U.S. Coast Guard, Pacific Fishery Management Council, Washington Trollers, the American Albacore Fishing Association, the American Fishermen's Research Foundation, Oregon Albacore Commission, and West Coast Seafood Processors Association.

Several key topics were covered. The first was an update on the Data Working Group that had finalized the data template for years 1995-2012 during last summer. Both heads of delegation agreed that the data should be made public. The Working Group plans to meet once comprehensive 2013 data become available and that is expected in April 2014. Both countries also provided a review of the preliminary catch and effort data for their respective fleets for the 2013 fishing season. The United States noted that a more reliable account of their fishing season will not be available until April 2014.

There was discussion that the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific Ocean's (ISC) Albacore Working Group plans to produce an updated stock assessment in July 2014. Concern was expressed that China is increasing its catch of North Pacific Albacore (both in directed fisheries and as bycatch) and not providing detailed catch and effort data to the ISC, the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission, or the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries. Both parties agreed that consideration should be given to bilateral engagement with China, potentially through a diplomatic letter of which Canada offered to prepare an initial draft.

The United States also asked if Canadian harvesters had noticed net markings on albacore this season that U.S. harvesters have documented. Both countries agreed to cooperate bilaterally on the issue.

Enforcement officials from both delegations did not report any substantial problems relating to the treaty. The Canadian officials did report some "administrative" infractions by U.S. vessels which are being followed up on by NOAA OLE.

Finally, both heads of delegation expressed their preliminary views on a new fishing regime for 2014 and beyond. Canada indicated that it is supportive of a multiyear

agreement to provide some certainty to the Canadian fleet and preclude the need to renegotiate each year. Interest was also expressed about revisiting the length of the season and participation for the Canadian fleet. The United States also spoke in general terms and reiterated its concern with the long-term future of the treaty, noting the continued lack of support from its industry. While the United States noted that terms and levels of a new regime still needed to be discussed, it also affirmed that the regime would include a phased-out approach with an understanding that by default there would not be a subsequent regime unless positions changed.

Canada indicated some concern over unlimited access to their EEZ by U.S vessels during a future regime. They suggested constraints be placed on U.S. vessels during the upcoming negotiations to prevent crowding in their zone.

The meeting concluded with an agreement to hold a formal negotiating session in Portland, Oregon, in April 2014. Canada indicated its strong preference for the meeting to take place in early April.