

National Marine Fisheries Service Report on Highly Migratory Species Related Activities

International Activities

The Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission Working Group on Negotiations met March 18-23, 2003, in La Jolla, CA. The Working Group has been attempting to complete a revised convention text that would strengthen the Commission and bring its terms of agreement into conformity with current international law and new international agreements dealing with fisheries conservation and management. It was hoped that this (the 10th meeting) would be the final Working Group meeting and that a composite final text could be presented to the full Commission for approval at its annual meeting in June 2003 in Antigua, Guatemala. There is broad agreement on almost all issues. However, the Working Group was unable to arrive at agreement on the articles dealing with "Decision Making" and "Entry Into Force." The current convention calls for unanimity, but that Convention was arrived at with only two members (United States and Costa Rica), and actual practice has been consensus (meaning no stated objections by any member). Several members want to retain unanimity in the new convention text, notwithstanding that "consensus" has been the actual practice. A related issue is how to deal with decisions when one or more members are absent from a meeting. Many members want a provision requiring at least acceptance by any absent member before a decision would be binding on that member; other nations want the measures agreed to by members present at a meeting at the time of adoption to be binding on all members. The "Entry Into Force" issue concerns how to ensure that there would not be two conventions in effect at the same time, while promoting acceptance and application of the revised convention as soon as practicable. The Working Group will reconvene after the annual Commission meeting in hopes of reaching final agreement on these issues, which are key to several companion articles in the Convention.

The first "consultation" under the U.S.-Canada Albacore Treaty is scheduled for April 15-16, 2003, in Vancouver, Washington. While the amendments to the Treaty have not been formally ratified by the U.S. Senate and legislation has not been enacted authorizing implementing regulations for the Treaty, the two Parties agree that the consultation should be held consistent with the intent of the Treaty amendments and to review and discuss the progress in being set to implement the amended Treaty by June 1, 2003, assuming ratification and legislation. The National Marine Fisheries Service is working on the regulatory documents and hopes for very quick action if Congress provides the necessary authority and waiver from certain procedural requirements, at least for the initial regulations. The regulatory measures would include logbook and reporting, vessel marking and identification, and hail-in and hail-out calls to a reporting office so that vessel activity can be tracked against limits in the amended Treaty. A report will be provided to the Council following this meeting.