

# U.S. aims to rewrite international tuna treaty

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Canada and the United States have long had a good working relationship when it comes to ocean harvest of migratory fish species, however, albacore tuna has recently caused some tension.

The treaty between Canada and the U.S. on Pacific Coast Albacore Tuna Vessels and Port Privileges was signed in 1981. This agreement was amended in 2002, and codified by law in April 2004. It allowed U.S. vessels to fish for albacore tuna in Canadian waters seaward of 12 miles from shore and gave 110 Canadian vessels the same the same freedom in U.S. waters. The treaty also allows Canadian and U.S. boats to use certain ports in the other's country to offload fish or obtain fuel and supplies. But, after 31-years under the old agreement, the U.S. government suspended the treaty this year, which could have a domino effect across the entire West Coast fishery.

"For many years, we were fishing up there and they were fishing down here and everything was fairly equal," said Nancy Fitzpatrick, executive director of the Oregon Albacore Commission. "But weather and water conditions have changed and seven of the last 10 years, Canadian fishing boats have taken 80-percent of their catch in U.S. waters.

"One of our concerns is the 110 boats allowed 31-years ago when the treaty was drafted were mostly family boats and smaller private boats. Now, the boats that are coming down are much larger and have way more capacity. Meaning they're harvesting far more fish. When it comes to the boats, we're not talking apples to apples anymore."

Canadian harvest of albacore in U.S. waters total about 12,000 tons annually. However, the U.S. fishermen catch less than 1,000 tons of albacore in Canadian water annually.

"Not renewing the treaty is our way of telling the Canadian fishing fleet we have been getting the short end of the stick too long and we're not going to do it anymore," said Wayne Heikkilal, executive director of Western Fishboat Owners Association. "We don't see why we'd stick to the treaty unless we can negotiate some new terms to catch up with the times.

"We do want to support the treaty and resign it, but not without some modifications. The two sides should be able to come to a good conclusion we won't have to renegotiate every few years."

Donald Mclsaac, executive director of the Pacific Fishery Management Council, stated in a letter, "Suspension of reciprocal access in 2012, or longer if necessary, will allow stakeholders and managers to better assess the information and data needed to address the long-term reciprocal privileges under the treaty,"

The Pacific Fishery Management Council makes recommendations to the U.S. government on how to manage California, Oregon and Washington fisheries.

Potential alterations to the treaty could include limiting the number of Canadian boats allowed in U.S. water, regulating how close Canadian boats can get to American boats engaged in fishing and limiting the tonnage the Canadian fleet can harvest.

The U.S. fleet is taking some risk by not resigning the treaties as well.

"There were times when fishing in Canadian waters was quite good and if the water shifts and the fish move back off the Canadian coast, they might not be willing to work with us," Fitzpatrick said.

There was also some concern that without the Canadian boats using the American ports, there may be

an economic impact. But, the lack of Canadian boats seems to be the least of the small port businesses concerns.

“Our biggest concern is the price of the tuna,” said Ecola Seafood Owner Cindy Beckman. “If there's a lot of tuna coming in the price goes down. If there isn't, the price is up. Not having Canadian boats isn't going to make much effect because the American boats are just going to catch more fish and that money will stay here instead of go back to Canada.”

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