

U.S. to Reduce Longline Tuna Catch

HONOLULU (AP) — Hawaii's longline fishing boat owners expect their sales of ahi will drop by millions of dollars under an agreement in which the United States will reduce its longline tuna catch for three years starting in 2015.

U.S. longline fishing boats in the western and central Pacific must cut their catch of bigeye tuna by 10 percent, the [Honolulu Star-Advertiser](#) [1] reported. That will amount to at least a \$10 million drop in bigeye tuna sales by 2017.

The catch limits were agreed to by the 27-member Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission last month in Cairns, Australia. The commission, of which the U.S. is a member, is a multinational group formed to promote sustainable fishing in the Pacific.

U.S. representatives to the commission argued for a higher limit but agreed to the reduction because it was in the best interest of the country, said Russell F. Smith, deputy assistant secretary of commerce for international fisheries.

Smith, who works for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, said the measure helps to ensure that tropical tunas, including bigeye, are better managed by the commission.

Each of the major developed countries' longline fleets agreed to a 10 percent reduction in their bigeye tuna catch, he said, except for China, which agreed to a 25 percent reduction.

China agreed to a larger cut to make up for reductions it was supposed to take in earlier years, observers said.

Longline vessels string a line in the ocean, ranging from one mile to 50 miles long, to catch fish. Nearly 90 percent of the bigeye caught by U.S. longline vessels is caught by Hawaii boats.

Hawaii Longline Association President Sean Martin, who was part of the U.S. delegation at Cairns, said he was disappointed with the commission's decision.

Fishing industry officials said the U.S. has complied with ongoing conservation and management measures set forth by the commission through strict monitoring and enforcement agreements, a number of other nations either exceed quotas or do not monitor catches to the same level as the U.S.

Martin said in 2008 the commission set a limit of 204 for the number of purse seine vessels — which are large industrial ships that use giant nets to surround and capture schools of tuna — in the Western Pacific, but there are now more than 300. The U.S., he said, has kept its number of vessels to the 40 as agreed to in the 2008

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