

A Review of United States Caribbean Fisheries Interests

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I am pleased to be here in Curaçao. Friendly relations between the United States and the Netherlands Antilles date from 1776 when the first recognition of the U.S. flag by a foreign nation occurred at St. Eustatius. This tradition of peace and friendship has characterized our historical relations with other nations of the Caribbean. Also the United States, by virtue of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, is a Caribbean nation as well. We have long maintained friendly, cordial relations with our Caribbean neighbors in nearly all matters, including fisheries.

Like many of you, the United States is involved in numerous difficult fisheries conservation and management issues. The Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976 (MFCMA) lays out the basic legal and policy responsibilities of the United States on both domestic and international fishery issues. The MFCMA established a 200 mile exclusive fisheries conservation zone on March 1, 1977. The zone was modified to an exclusive economic zone by Presidential Proclamation in March 1983.

Among other things, the Act established Management Councils in all U.S. coastal regions. Of the eight councils, three are in the Gulf and Caribbean region. The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council has its headquarters in Tampa, Florida; the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council has its office in Charleston, South Carolina; and the Caribbean Fishery Management Council is headquartered in San Juan, Puerto Rico. The basic function of these councils is to develop fishery management plans within their geographic area of responsibility. Except for state and federal officials who serve on the councils, council voting members are recommended by state governors, and appointed by the federal Department of Commerce. In practice they reflect a mix of industry, recreational, and conservation views. Department of State officials also serve as non-voting representatives on each of the eight councils.

I would like to encourage fisheries officials attending this conference to contact these councils regarding possible conservation and management issues of mutual concern. For example, the Caribbean Fishery Management Council deals on a day-to-day basis with numerous fishery resource and management issues that are very similar to concerns of other Caribbean nationals, particularly

those in the Lesser Antilles. The council was also instrumental in helping to sponsor a Caribbean workshop on shared stocks convened by FAO in Puerto Rico last year.

The principal U.S. fishing interests in the Caribbean region are those of small-scale fishermen, commercial longliners, and sportsmen. Small scale fishermen are concentrated in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands and are for the most part targeting snapper-grouper, other reef fish and lobster. Relatively recently swordfish longlining operations have increased in the Caribbean with operations based on both the U.S. mainland and in Puerto Rico. This change has been driven by increasing demand for swordfish on the mainland. The third aspect of our Caribbean fishery interests is sportfishing. Recreational fishing opportunities are important to many vacationers and sportfishing plays an important role in the local economy of many nations in the Caribbean region.

Our interest in Washington is to help facilitate cordial, friendly fishery relations in all of these areas. With this in mind we have tried to cooperate with our Caribbean neighbors. Some of the steps we have taken involve formal treaties. For example, the United States and the United Kingdom concluded a treaty in 1979 concerning the continuation of traditional small scale fishing in the waters around the Virgin Islands. This treaty provides for reciprocal fishing rights between the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) and the British Virgin Island (BVI). The arrangement allows small-scale fishermen from both countries to fish in the other country's waters in accordance with certain limitations on the number and size of vessels involved, areas of fishing, and other restrictions.

The United States also signed a treaty with Colombia in 1972 defining rights and obligations in the "treaty waters" around the banks of Quita Sueno, Roncador, and Serrana, regions formerly claimed by both countries. In January of this year, representatives of the two countries concluded an Exchange of Notes to impose a temporary ban on the taking of conch off Quita Sueno based on the needs for conservation of the species. As part of our continuing consultations regarding fishing in these waters, U.S. and Colombian scientists will meet in Miami December 8 and 9 to discuss other treaty waters conservation issues of mutual interest.

Another example of continuing cooperation are the Mexus-Gulf meetings. These meetings have taken place for eleven years; they allow U.S. and Mexican scientists to coordinate research in the Gulf of Mexico. Joint research efforts have expanded and may eventually encourage more cooperation. In addition to these examples, other negotiations regarding fisheries access have occurred with certain Caribbean nations in recent years. We stand ready to help improve understanding and dialogue between ourselves and foreign nations and/or to undertake negotiations with other countries or groups of countries in the Caribbean region.

In any agreement several factors are important. It may be helpful for me to address some of these to help avoid possible misunderstandings about the United States' position.

The United States does not recognize national jurisdiction over tuna. It is our view that tuna, which migrate thousands of miles in open sea, are best regulated internationally through a regional framework. This is the basis of our support and participation in international organizations such as the International Commission for Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) in the Atlantic and the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) in the Pacific. It was also the basis for the negotiations we concluded recently with 16 island nations to obtain a regional access agreement for U.S. tuna fishermen operating in the South Pacific region. Let me add here that the ICCAT organization also has responsibility to address billfish management and is taking a closer look at this issue throughout the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean. The United States is working with other nations which longline in the Caribbean to help obtain a better database and expand scientific research for this fishery. I should also add with regard to billfish, that an international symposium has been scheduled for Hawaii for next August. I understand from the organizers, the National Coalition for Marine Conservation, that Caribbean nations will be invited to participate.

Aside from the U.S. judicial position on tuna, we recognize the exclusive right of other countries to conserve and manage fisheries resources, including billfish, in their own zone for their domestic benefit. We similarly recognize the right of others to establish and enforce fishing regulations within their own zones. Fortunately, there have been only a few instances in the eastern Caribbean where enforcement incidents have occurred which have involved U.S. fishing operations. When such problems arise, the Department of State attempts to help out where it can, and to seek solutions that can help prevent future incidents.

As I stated earlier, the United States, although a continental nation, is also a Caribbean nation. We recognize that for island nations particularly, marine resources can be a significant part of their total economy. The United States understands that, in this environment, conservation and management are important and special responsibilities, and local awareness of and interest in these resources is growing around the world including the Caribbean. Accordingly, the Department of State desires to work closely with foreign countries to help facilitate fisheries cooperation wherever it can.

For example, concerning specific fisheries where U.S. fishermen desire to obtain access in the Caribbean region, the Department of State is willing to be very flexible and to explore various options that may be appropriate in particular circumstances. We are open to consider any kind of arrangement which can improve cooperation, avoid conflicts, and can offer mutual benefits to both

parties. Such possibilities may include bilateral government-to-government agreements (such as the treaty between Colombia and the United States, and the treaty covering fishing between the U.S. Virgin Islands and the British Virgin Islands); governmental regional arrangements (such as the ICCAT treaty in the Atlantic and the pending regional tuna treaty in the South Pacific); or arrangements private individuals might enter into to purchase licenses directly from local officials, or to work out individualized joint venture, or other cooperative arrangements.

We stand ready to accommodate these or other possibilities, but as a good neighbor we also want to carefully take into account the views of local Caribbean nations. If a formalized government arrangement appears to offer the best mutual prospects, the Department of State would look forward to cooperation within the Caribbean either on a bilateral basis or with a group of nations such as the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), or in other possible regional arrangements. It is important to emphasize that any successful fisheries relationship involves responsibilities and obligations as well as mutual benefits.

In summary, dramatic changes are taking place in the international fishing business. There continues to be strong and growing demand for seafood products, in the United States, in the Caribbean, and elsewhere around the world. As a result there is strong pressure by most coastal states, including those in the Caribbean, to manage their fisheries resources more effectively and to obtain greater economic benefits from them. The United States recognizes this transition and is prepared to promote, coordinate, and facilitate fisheries cooperation in the Caribbean region wherever mutual interests exist. Finally, let me add that the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute (GCFI) plays an extremely important role through its annual meetings in providing a forum for Caribbean nations to improve their dialog and increase their cooperation on fishery issues of mutual concern.

Thank you very much!