

70th meeting of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission

A new International Convention for the management of tunas and billfish in the eastern Pacific Ocean was adopted at the 70th meeting of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC), which was held in Antigua, Guatemala during 24-27 June. The new Convention supports an ecosystem and precautionary approach to fisheries conservation, ensuring that the impact that fishing for tunas has on other species is taken into account.

The Chairman of the meeting, vice minister of Livestock of the Guatemalan Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Nutrition, Dr. Pablo R. Girón Muñoz said that this meeting marked a watershed for the management of the fisheries in the eastern Pacific. Among other things, the new Convention incorporates all the modern international fisheries standards, and it provides for participation by the European Union and fishing entities, including Chinese Taipei, in its conservation work.

In 2002 a record catch of more than 700,000 tons of tunas and billfish were taken from the area. Dr. Girón said that the stocks of most species in the area were in very good condition. However, restraints on fishing were necessary given the continued expansion of fleets. The IATTC has restrictions on the size of the purse seine fleet, but catches from longline vessels have increased dramatically during the last two years, probably because of a movement of vessels from other areas. For the first time, the IATTC has proposed a restriction on catches by longline vessels.

During the Antigua meeting the Commission decided to embark upon a program to mitigate sea turtle bycatch.

Spain announced that it had obtained approval from all of the other members of the IATTC and was completing the formal processes for adhering to the treaty. The Commission now consists of 14 members: Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, France, Japan, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Spain, the United States, Vanuatu, and Venezuela. It is responsible for carrying out research into the tunas and billfish in the eastern Pacific and for the management of the fisheries for these stocks. The IATTC responsibility stretches from the coast of the Americas between Canada and Chile to almost Hawaii in the north and French Polynesia in the south.

(Further information is available from www.iattc.org.)