

Pacific islands push US to improve fisheries deal

March 20 2011



A net filled with tuna being hauled out of the freezer hold of the US-flagged fishing boat at the port in Majuro, 2010. A group of 17 Pacific island nations began putting pressure on the United States to reshape a 23-year-old fisheries treaty.

A group of 17 Pacific island nations began putting pressure on the United States on Saturday to reshape a 23-year-old fisheries treaty.

At the start of a consultation and renegotiation meeting in Majuro, the [Marshall Islands Fisheries](#) Minister Mattlan Zackhras said a "paradigm shift" has taken place in the tuna industry.

Islands are demanding a greater share of fishing revenue, which would mean updating the treaty.

US State Department negotiator Williams Gibbons-Fly acknowledged a "possible need to reshape the treaty" which was first approved in 1988, expires in 2013.

But it is not a not normal negotiation between two sides. The islands represented by the Forum Fisheries Agency in the talks are a competing mix of three major interests.

It includes the Parties to the Nauru Ageement (PNA) group that wants the treaty revamped, the non-PNA nations, many of which like the treaty because it provides aid regardless of whether fish are caught in their area, and [Papua New Guinea](#), which has rich fishing grounds and multiple processing facilities.

Critics say the treaty gives the US tuna fleet access to lucrative Pacific fishing grounds for a fraction of the price Asian fishing companies pay, and also allows the US fleet to avoid tuna fishing cutbacks aimed at sustaining stocks.

The group of islands that control waters where 25 percent of the world's tuna are caught is demanding major changes to the treaty.

"The treaty was the best deal we could have asked for at one point but today it is worst deal in terms of revenue return," said Eugene Pangelinan, the deputy director of fisheries for the Federated States of Micronesia.

The treaty provides \$21 million annually to the islands to allow up to 40 purse seiners to fish.

"The treaty was the best in its day, but the (US) revenue would have to increase 10 times for it to approach today's value," said Maurice Brownjohn, the commercial manager for the PNA group of eight nations

that control ocean zones where the bulk of tuna is caught in the Pacific.

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Citation: Pacific islands push US to improve fisheries deal (2011, March 20) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-03-pacific-islands-fisheries.html>

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