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On U.S. Embargo Against Mexican Tuna Imports

by Steven Ranieri

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On Oct. 10, San Francisco US District Court Judge Thelton Henderson ruled to enforce legislation against Mexico which prohibits tuna imports from nations found to capture more than a specific number of dolphins in the course of regular tuna fishing activities. The case was filed by environmental groups. Five days later, Washington made the tuna embargo official. Mexican officials reacted by demanding that the US government file an appeal, and accused Washington of putting up yet another unfair trade barrier. Fisheries Ministry (SEPESCA) spokespersons pointed out that in September, the US Commerce Department acknowledged Mexico's efforts to reduce dolphin mortality by 64% since 1986. If the embargo remains in effect for 60 days without successful appeal, it would be automatically extended to third nations who purchase Mexican tuna and export it to the US. In April, the three largest US tuna packers implemented an embargo against Mexican tuna. Mexico's exports to the US dropped from 14,000 tons in 1989 to 3,000 tons in the first nine months of the year. Mexico's tuna fishing fleet comprised of 60 vessels ranks as the second-largest in the world, after the US. The annual catch averages 150,000 tons. Official statistics indicate that 7% of the total is exported to the US. On Nov. 2, El Financiero reported that according to the US Embassy in Mexico City, the San Francisco District Court rejected Washington's request to lift the embargo on Mexican tuna. (Basic data from El Financiero, 10/15-17/90, 10/23/90, 11/02/90; El Nacional, 10/16/90, 10/17/90; Agence France Presse, 10/18/90; Notimex, 10/18/90, 10/19/90, 11/03/90)

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