

10-9-1996

# Mexico Protests U.S. Delay in Lifting Tuna Embargo

LADB Staff

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex>

---

## Recommended Citation

LADB Staff. "Mexico Protests U.S. Delay in Lifting Tuna Embargo." (1996). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex/3643>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in SourceMex by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact [amywinter@unm.edu](mailto:amywinter@unm.edu).

## **Mexico Protests U.S. Delay in Lifting Tuna Embargo**

*by LADB Staff*

*Category/Department: Mexico*

*Published: 1996-10-09*

In late September, the US Senate postponed a decision to lift an embargo on imports of tuna from Mexico and other countries in Latin America, prompting heavy protests from the Mexican government and the tuna industry. The Senate bill was similar to one passed in the House of Representatives in July of this year. The House legislation would have eliminated the embargo because Mexico and five other countries have made sufficient progress in reducing the incidental capture of dolphins in fishing nets (see SourceMex, 07/14/96). The US imposed the tuna embargo in 1990, arguing that Mexican fishing boats were exceeding the 15% international limit for incidental capture of dolphins in fishing nets. The proposal to eliminate the embargo had already been approved by a key Senate subcommittee and endorsed by US President Bill Clinton.

A number of prominent environmental organizations including the Center for Marine Conservation, the Environmental Defense Fund, the World Wildlife Fund, the National Wildlife Federation, and Greenpeace have endorsed the House bill. The groups have suggested that the bill's enforcement, monitoring, and incentive measures will actually reduce dolphin deaths. According to the legislation passed in the House and proposed in the Senate, any fishing vessels from Mexico and the other five Latin American countries affected that make a good-faith attempt to avoid ensnaring dolphins in their nets would be able to claim the "dolphin-safe" designation for their tuna catches. Observers would be placed on tuna-fishing boats in the Pacific Ocean, where dolphins and tuna tend to swim together.

However, the failure of the Senate to consider the bill during this legislative session has delayed US action on the tuna embargo indefinitely. In turn, this delay in lifting the embargo has prompted strong protests from Mexican officials, who promised to take whatever actions are necessary to assist the Mexican tuna industry. According to Julia Carabias head of the Environment, Natural Resources and Fisheries Secretariat (Secretaria del Medio Ambiente, Recursos Naturales y Pesca, SEMARNAP) the Mexican government had, until now, considered the US legislative process as the most viable option to end the US embargo on Mexican tuna. But Carabias told reporters that President Ernesto Zedillo is now considering other options, such as requesting a dispute-resolution panel under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and renewing efforts to have the matter resolved under the rules of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Meantime, the national fisheries industry chamber (Camara Nacional de la Industria Pesquera, CANAIPE) raised the possibility that the Mexican tuna industry will withdraw support for a program that allows independent observers to monitor the practices of Mexican fishing fleets. According to CANAIPE legislative expert Alfonso Rosinol, the Mexican fishing industry has already spent about US\$200 million over the course of four years, which is money that could otherwise be spent to provide assistance to the fishing industry. The observer program is part of the Multilateral Accord of La Jolla, which pledges progressive reductions in the incidental capture of dolphins.

Rosinol estimated that the embargo has had a devastating effect on the Mexican fisheries industry, causing tuna exports to decline to 28,000 metric tons in 1994, compared with 83,000 MT in 1989, the year before the embargo was imposed. Government statistics released in August confirm the trend. According to SEMARNAP, Mexican tuna exports to the US peaked at US\$81 million in 1988. After the embargo, exports declined to US\$55 million in 1990 and US\$36 million in 1991. Rosinol said the one positive effect of the embargo was to force the Mexican fisheries industry to increase marketing efforts at home. As a result, he said, Mexican tuna consumption increased by about 90% between 1990 and 1995.

The environmental organization Greenpeace Mexico in late September also issued a statement criticizing the US Senate for failing to take action to end the embargo. On the other hand, the statement also placed blame on former president Carlos Salinas de Gortari's administration for passing up an opportunity to promote stronger anti-boycott legislation in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). Greenpeace said the Salinas government could have pursued language in GATT that identified actions such as the US tuna embargo as a clear violation of GATT. "The lesson from this episode is that the Mexican government should take a stronger stance against the US in bilateral matters," said Greenpeace. (Sources: Agence France- Presse, 09/30/96, 10/01/96; Excelsior, 10/01/96; El Universal, 10/01/96, 10/02/96; El Economista, 10/03/96)

-- End --