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U.S. Government Lifts Embargo on Imports of Mexican Shrimp

by Carlos Navarro

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In a widely expected move, the US government rescinded an embargo placed on some imports of Mexican shrimp earlier this year. The US imposed the restriction on the imports because of concerns that Mexican shrimp-industry practices were endangering rare sea turtles ([SourceMex, March 3, 2010](#)). The ban, which went into effect on April 20, prompted vigorous protests from the Mexican fisheries industry, but US authorities promised they would work closely with the Mexican government and Cámara Nacional de las Industrias Pesquera y Acuícola (CANAINPESCA) to ensure that appropriate measures to protect turtles were put in place. Discussions took place during the off season for the Mexican shrimping industry, and the ban was lifted just days after the shrimping season began in October.

Mexico cooperates with efforts to protect endangered sea turtles

In announcing the lifting of the ban, the US State Department certified that Mexican shrimpers had changed their methods of harvesting shrimp to meet specifications required by the US National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). The biggest change is that the Mexican shrimping boats are now using the proper Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs) in their nets, ensuring that endangered turtles do not become trapped with the catch.

"The decision is the result of an inter-institutional effort of the Mexican government and the industry, as well as working diplomatically with the US government," the State Department said in a statement released on Oct. 15.

Ramón Corral Ávila, director of the Comisión Nacional de Acuicultura y Pesca (CONAPESCA), speaking at a news conference to announce the lifting of the embargo, said the recertification of Mexican shrimp was not a mere formality, as the Mexican government worked hard with shrimpers in seven states—Sinaloa, Sonora, Oaxaca, Veracruz, Chiapas, Campeche, and Tamaulipas—to adopt sustainability practices and also to ensure that TEDs were properly installed.

For Mexico to obtain certification, environmental authorities from the two countries inspected more than 232 shrimping vessels to certify that they had installed the TEDs, Corral said.

The CONAPESCA director said the Secretaría de Marina (SEMAR) and the Secretaría de Agricultura Ganadería, Desarrollo Rural, Pesca y Alimentación (SAGARPA) would continue monitoring shrimping fleets throughout the year.

Deputy economy secretary Beatriz Leycegui, who also attended the news conference, said the US move to lift the embargo on Mexican shrimp is important from an economic standpoint. She said Mexico expects to obtain revenues totaling US\$340 million from shrimp exports to the US. In 2009, Mexico exported 40,000 tons of shrimp to buyers north of the border, accounting for 86% of the country's total exports of the crustacean. The other major buyers are France, China, and Japan.

But Mexican officials emphasized that they view the shrimping industry through more than an economic lens. Alejandro Estivill Castro, who handles North American affairs at the Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores (SRE), said the decision to comply with the US requirement is also important to Mexicans. "With this action we demonstrated that we are interested in committing to a fisheries industry that respects and promotes the recovery and preservation of all species of sea turtles," Estivill Castro said at the press conference.

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