

INTERNATIONAL DOLPHIN CONSERVATION PROGRAM

**WORKING GROUP TO PROMOTE AND PUBLICIZE THE AIDCP DOLPHIN  
SAFE TUNA CERTIFICATION SYSTEM**

At the request of the Working Group, the Secretariat completed this draft-final version, reflecting the final comments received at the 30<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Parties in October 2014

**THE AGREEMENT ON THE INTERNATIONAL DOLPHIN CONSERVATION  
PROGRAM (AIDCP) AND THE AIDCP DOLPHIN SAFE LABEL:  
LEADERSHIP THROUGH RESPONSIBLE FISHING PRACTICES**



**WHAT IS THE AIDCP?**

The Agreement for the International Dolphin Conservation Program (AIDCP) is a multilateral agreement for the protection of dolphins in the tuna fisheries in the eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO). Adopted in 1998, the Agreement was the culmination of years of work to address concerns regarding dolphin mortality in the purse-seine fisheries for tunas in the EPO.

The objectives of the AIDCP are:

1. To progressively reduce incidental dolphin mortalities in the tuna purse-seine fishery in the Agreement Area to levels approaching zero, through the setting of annual limits;
2. With the goal of eliminating dolphin mortality in this fishery, to seek ecologically sound means of capturing large yellowfin tunas not in association with dolphins; and
3. To ensure the long-term sustainability of the tuna stocks in the Agreement Area, as well as that of the marine resources related to this fishery, taking into consideration the interrelationship among species in the ecosystem, with special emphasis on, inter alia, avoiding, reducing and minimizing bycatch and discards of juvenile tunas and non-target species.

The AIDCP represents the culmination of years of work and cooperation among governments, scientists and fishermen, who worked tirelessly to develop the gear, procedures and technical knowledge utilized in today's fishery.

**WHO PARTICIPATES IN THE AIDCP?**

Currently, the Parties to the Agreement are Belize, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, European Union, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, United States, and Venezuela. Also, Bolivia and Vanuatu apply the AIDCP provisionally, as foreseen in Article XXIX of the Agreement, although they are not Parties.

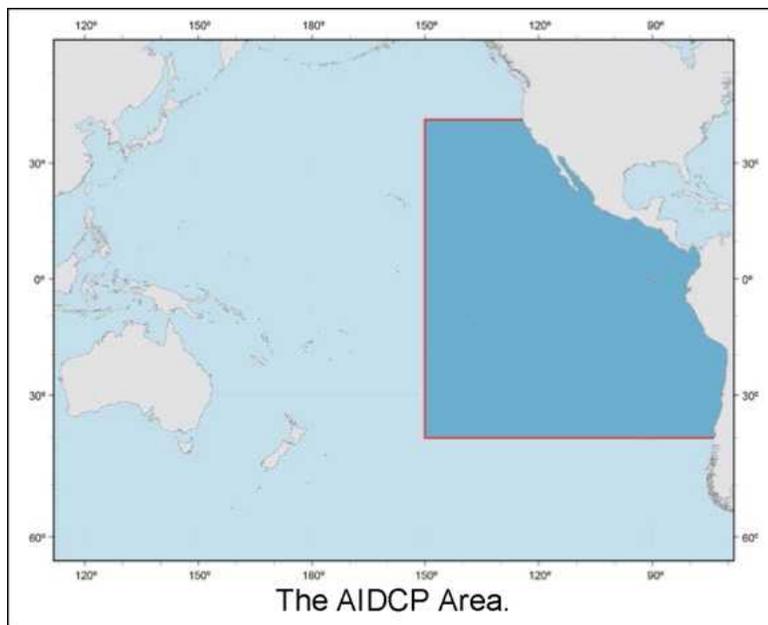
The work of the AIDCP is transparent, and the participation of interested stakeholders is encouraged.

Accordingly, the Agreement provides for the participation of representatives from environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the tuna industry in the work of the AIDCP's compliance body, the International Review Panel (IRP).

### WHY WAS THE AIDCP CREATED?

In the 1950s, purse-seine fishermen discovered a unique association, found almost exclusively in the tropical eastern Pacific Ocean, between dolphins and yellowfin tuna. Often, schools of large adult yellowfin tuna are found swimming under herds of dolphins on the surface. Since that time, the predominant method for catching adult yellowfin tuna in the region has been to locate dolphin herds at the surface and, using this valuable visual cue, encircle the schools of tuna under the dolphins with purse-seine fishing nets. Frequently, in the course of this operation, dolphins are also encircled in the net. In the early years of the fishery, little effort was made to release encircled dolphins, which became entangled in the nets and drowned. No exact figures are available, but it is estimated that the resulting mortality at times exceeded 150,000 dolphins per year, which led to dramatic declines in some of the dolphin stocks. The international community recognized that this was not desirable or sustainable, and fishermen and researchers began developing equipment and practices that allowed encircled dolphins to be released from the nets unharmed, while retaining the valuable tuna catches below.

Decades of cooperative work produced gear and techniques that reduced dolphin mortality in fishing operations substantially, and in 1992 the countries involved in the fishery signed the La Jolla Agreement, which established a groundbreaking voluntary program to strictly limit the allowable mortality and regulate fishing for tunas associated with dolphins. Many of the hallmarks of that agreement were incorporated in the binding AIDCP, which entered into force in 1999.



### HOW DOES AIDCP ACHIEVE ITS OBJECTIVES?

The functioning of the AIDCP is guided by the Agreement and its annexes, as well as by the decisions taken by the Parties, which are reflected in the [resolutions](#), [procedures](#) and [guidelines](#) that have been adopted. The five most important elements of the AIDCP are:

**Dolphin mortality limits:** The Agreement imposes strict dolphin mortality limits for the purse-seine fishery in the Agreement Area. It restricts the total incidental observed dolphin mortality to no more than five thousand

individuals annually. This global limit is then divided among the vessels that are authorized to fish for tunas associated with dolphins. If the limit is reached, then all fishing for tunas associated with dolphins must cease for the rest of the year. However, in practice, the total annual dolphin mortality recorded by observers in the fishery has never exceeded 1,600



**Top:** a purse-seine net is deployed on a school of yellowfin tuna, also encircling a herd of dolphins.

**Bottom:** dolphins swim unharmed over the float line of the purse-seine net during the backdown maneuver.

individuals since the AIDCP entered into force, and in 2013 was 801 individuals. Similarly, any vessel that reaches its individual annual Dolphin Mortality Limit (DML) must stop fishing for tunas associated with dolphins for the rest of the year. Finally, annual mortality limits, based on the best available science, are set for the various individual dolphin stocks impacted by the fishery. If any one of these limits is reached, fishing for tunas associated with that stock by the entire fleet must cease for the remainder of the year. Again, in practice, none of these limits has ever been reached. The individual dolphin stock limits should be revised in the near future in order to take account of possible changes in the related dolphin populations.

***On-Board Observer Program:*** Only purse-seine vessels with a carrying capacity greater than 363 metric tons are permitted to apply for a DML and fish for tunas associated with dolphins, and the Agreement mandates that all such vessels must carry an independent observer aboard at all times, whether or not they fish for tunas associated with dolphins. The observers, who have received

extensive training in order to ensure that they can perform all the necessary duties and functions, record the vessels' activities in detail, and send regular reports on observed dolphin mortality; in this way, compliance with the DML system and other operational requirements of the AIDCP is closely monitored and strictly enforced through reports to, and action by, the IRP. Among their other duties, the observers also record bycatches of non-target species taken during fishing operations.

***Operating requirements:*** The AIDCP also requires the use of specific fishing gear, equipment, techniques and procedures that have proven effective in minimizing harm to dolphins. All vessels with a DML must have a dolphin safety panel installed in their nets, and are required to perform a maneuver known as "backdown" (illustrated in the photo) whenever dolphins are encircled in the net. Used in combination, these two factors allow encircled dolphins to escape safely over a portion of the purse-seine net float line that becomes submerged. The vessel must also carry speedboats, a raft, snorkeling gear, and other equipment that allow the vessel crew to make sure that all dolphins are released before the net is retrieved and the tuna catches brought on board. Also, divers are used to release dolphins from the net.

***Training and qualification of fishing captains:*** Under the AIDCP, fishing captains must be trained and authorized before they can direct fishing operations on vessels with DMLs.

Authorized captains must be familiar with the requirements of the AIDCP, and trained in how to apply them in order to avoid all possible harm to dolphins. The performance of individual captains is monitored through the on-board observer program and reviewed by the IRP: captains with poor performance records, or who repeatedly commit infractions, are removed from the list of authorized captains and can no longer work on vessels with DMLs.

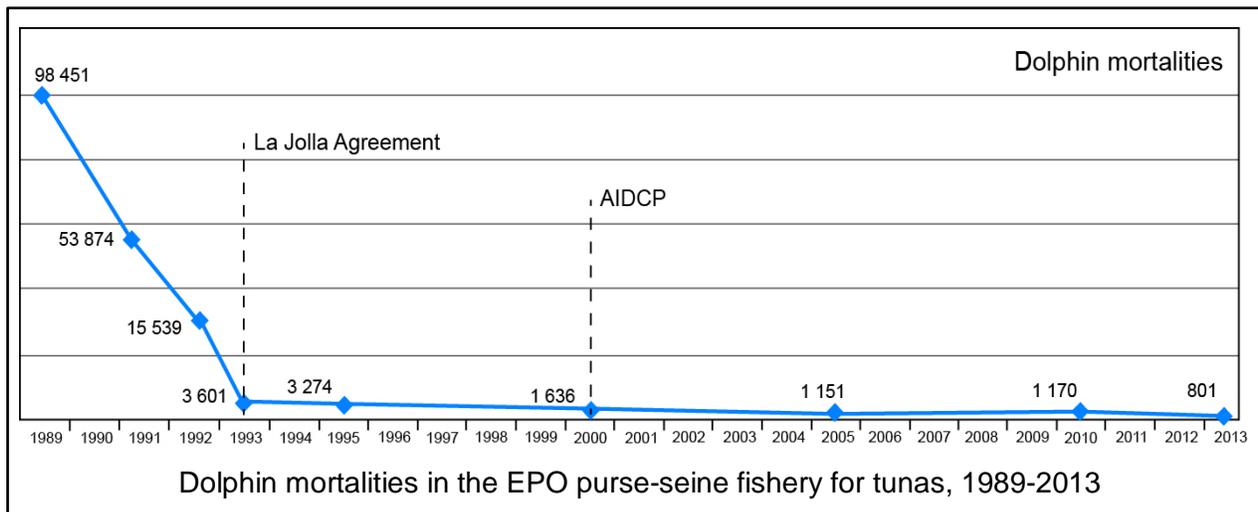
**Compliance monitoring and transparency:** Cases of potential infractions recorded by observers are reviewed by the IRP and, if an infraction is identified, the vessel's flag Party is notified. The Party is required to investigate such cases and, if appropriate, apply meaningful sanctions, and then report back to the IRP on the outcomes and disposition of all investigations.

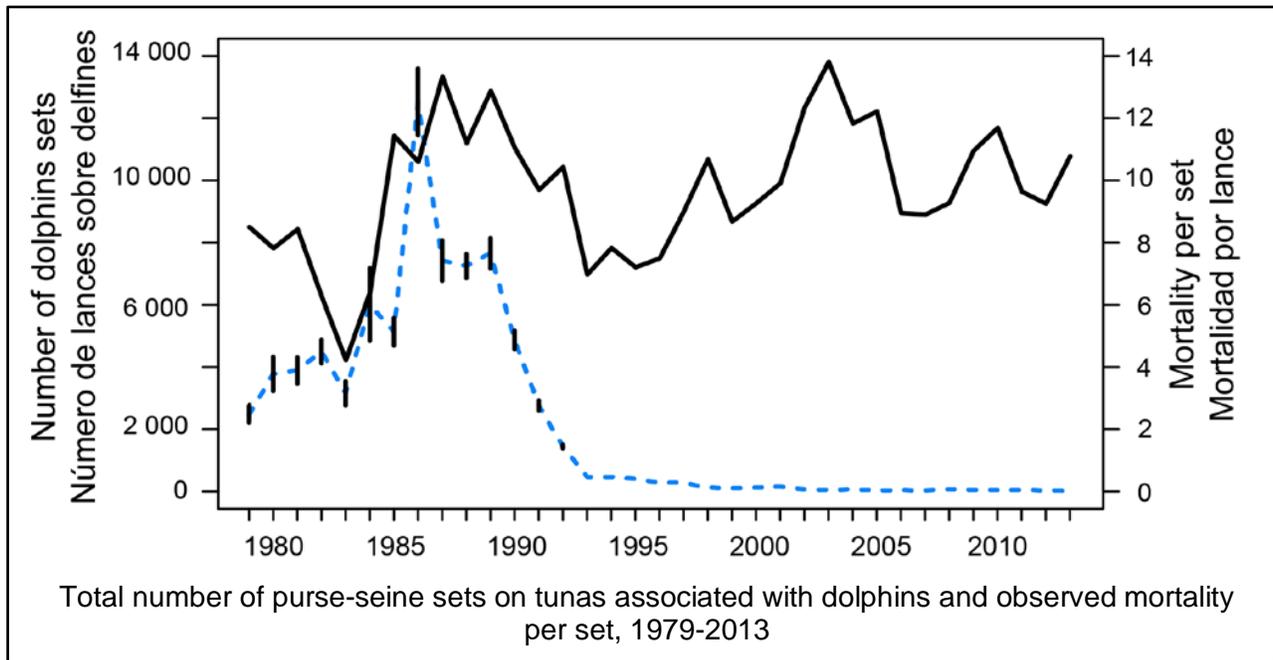
### HAS THE AIDCP BEEN A SUCCESS?

The results achieved under the AIDCP and its predecessor, the La Jolla Agreement, have been significant. In the 1960s and 1970s, the estimated annual dolphin mortality in the fishery exceeded 150,000 animals, and as recently as 1989 the estimated mortality still exceeded 98,000. By the time the La Jolla Agreement was signed in 1992, cooperative international efforts had reduced the estimated annual mortality to 15,538 animals. But then in 1993, the first year of implementation of the La Jolla Agreement, observed dolphin mortalities decreased immediately to 3,601 animals. The La Jolla Agreement was succeeded by the AIDCP, which entered into force in 2000, and by 2013 the annual observed dolphin mortality was 801 individuals. Thus, since the operational methods now enshrined in the AIDCP were first formalized in the La Jolla Agreement, dolphin mortality in the Agreement Area has declined by over 94%, and by over 99% when compared to the historic highs. This very low level of dolphin mortality under the international program has been consistently maintained over the last 20 years, and this has been achieved in the context of a fishery in which over 10,000 sets on tunas associated with dolphins are made each year, and where each set may involve interactions with tens or even hundreds of dolphins.

Of course, such success is not possible without the cooperation of the fishermen. In 2011, only 16 possible infractions were presented to the IRP for review, from a total of 11,870 dolphin sets made that year, an average of only 1.4 possible infractions for every 1,000 sets made.

These graphs show the enormous strides that have been made under the AIDCP. Additionally, by catching predominantly large, mature yellowfin tuna, the fishery maximizes the sustainable yield from the tuna stocks.





#### WHO SUPPORTS THE AIDCP?

The hard work and achievements realized under the AIDCP have been recognized by the international community and environmental NGOs. In recognition of its success, in 2005 the Agreement was awarded the prestigious Margarita Lizarraga Medal, awarded every two years by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) for exemplary implementation of international rules for responsible fisheries and marine resource management. In presenting the award, Jacques Diouf, the Director-General of the FAO, commended the Agreement for having diligently applied the relevant principles set forth in the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, and for the utilization of fishing gear and techniques which have produced the enormous reduction in dolphin mortalities in the fishery. According to the Director-General, the AIDCP was selected for the award *"in recognition of its comprehensive, sustainable and catalytic initiatives in support of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, in particular those aspects relating to the precautionary approach and to the utilization of fishing gear and techniques which minimize the catch of non-target species."*

Similarly, the AIDCP has been singled out for praise by environmental NGOs (for example, World Wildlife Fund, Greenpeace, Environmental Defense Fund, National Wildlife Federation, Ocean Conservancy, and Pew Environmental Trust) that have observed the AIDCP in action and, in some instances, participated directly in the work of the IRP:

*"The AIDCP provides protection for each individual dolphin stock or species to ensure its continued growth and recovery; requires that measures be adopted to avoid and reduce the discard of other marine species caught by the fishery such as sea turtles, sharks and billfish; and mandates actions that will guarantee the sustained health of the tuna fishery and the marine ecosystem of the eastern tropical Pacific."*

### **WHAT IS THE "AIDCP DOLPHIN SAFE" LABEL?**

In June 2001, the Parties to the AIDCP created the voluntary "AIDCP Dolphin Safe" label for tuna products from the EPO. The label conveys to consumers that the tuna products were caught exclusively in purse-seine sets in which there were no observed mortalities or serious injuries of dolphins when the tuna was caught, a claim backed by 100% observer coverage of participating vessels. AIDCP Dolphin Safe tuna certification is supported by a transparent monitoring, tracking, and verification system established under the auspices of the binding international agreement that includes wide participation by coastal and fishing nations of the EPO.

The "AIDCP Dolphin Safe" status of tuna from the EPO is verified and tracked from the moment of capture all the way through to the point of retail sale. Tuna catches classified as AIDCP dolphin safe are kept separate aboard the fishing vessels from other catches, and are identified by means of unique tuna tracking forms (TTFs). TTF numbers accompany catches through unloading, storage, and processing, to ensure that tuna products receiving the AIDCP label are truly "dolphin safe".

In summary, the hallmarks of the "AIDCP Dolphin Safe" label are:

- Assurance that no dolphins were observed killed or seriously injured in process of catching the tuna that bears the label.
- It is supported by 100% observer coverage of all fishing trips made by purse-seine vessels of capacity greater than 363 metric tons, including those that fish for tunas associated with dolphins.
- It is based on a system that requires strict compliance with the mandatory requirements of the AIDCP.
- Compliance with these requirements is verified, and the tuna receiving the label are tracked continuously from capture to market.
- The work of the AIDCP and the AIDCP Dolphin Safe certification system are transparent and are monitored by the IRP, which includes governments and representatives from both the tuna industry and environmental NGOs.
- The tuna was harvested in compliance with all applicable conservation and management measures.
- It is fully consistent with the guidelines for the certification of fishery products approved by FAO.