



SWORDFISH: A VERY PROFITABLE ILEGAL COMMERCE

LEGAL FRAMEWORK:

Executive Decree No.33 of August 20 of 1997 reserves the billfish fishery in the Republic of Panama for sport fishing, and the best practice of catch and release should be applied. This regulation prohibits additionally, the catch, salt & dried use, and commercial export of black marlin, blue marlin, striped marlin, spearfish, white marlin, sailfish and swordfish.

However we observe that this regulation is continuously being violated, as swordfish is commercialized for export without any type of controls, which constitutes an environmental crime according to Law No. 5 of January 28 of 2005.

FISHING FLEET:

The swordfish catch is carried out by a long liner fleet that flies the panamanian flag and operates in international waters; however, we don't know if the fleet maintains the satellite monitoring system in operation, to allow the surveillance by the panamanian authorities: without this control it is impossible to set the origin of the catch.



INTERNATIONAL COMMERCE:

The fact is that although there are no available details of the specie in the panamanian exports, the swordfish is listed in the imports from Panama to the United States.

So, in the year 2004 the United States imported from Panama 1.0 millions kilos of swordfish with a value of 9.9 million dollars. For the year 2005 the registered weight was of 1.2 million kilos with a value of 11.8 million dollars. In June 2006 the weight and value of the swordfish imports from Panama reached 52% of last year totals. The main part of the panamanian product is sold fresh, whereas the frozen product and steaks represent a minimum portion of sales.

SANITARY CONTROLS :

The Food and Drug Administration of the United States (FDA), periodically issues import alerts to monitor sanitary aspects of different products that enter United States territory. It is very interesting that in the case of swordfish several import alerts have been issued after the date of Executive Decree No.33, to analyze methyl mercury content in the imported products from the different countries of origin just as from the shippers; three panamanian companies appear in the FDA's lists.

The strange thing is that one of the companies for the year 2003, listed in their web site among the offered products, not only swordfish but sailfish and marlins. Lately they eliminated the species from the list but they maintain the commerce. Two of the three companies are related with the longliner fleet that operate in international waters and the third one has their own long liner fleet operating in national waters.



Xiphias gladius is the scientific name of swordfish. The photo below clearly shows that the “bill” is removed for the commercialization of the specimens.

Foto: Fish Base. (Chow, Seinen - National Research Institute for Far Seas Fisheries)



These specimens taken by commercial fishery can easily become sports fishing world records; you can notice that these commercial landings also include specimens that maybe have not reached the reproductive stage because of their small size.

There are two required questions we must ask:

1. Are these fishes really taken in international waters?
2. How this product appears in the United States as an export from Panama, shipped by panamanian companies, if Panama prohibits the commercial export of the specie?



WE NEED YOUR HELP!