

# Japan agrees to ban on drift-net fishing

## Pact would halt major threat to species

**By Stu Glauberman**  
Advertiser Staff Writer

Japan will reverse its position and submit to a total ban on international drift-net fishing under an agreement expected to be announced today.

If the ban goes into effect, it will be a major victory for environmentalists and fishery management officials here, who have sought to prevent tuna, swordfish and other species vital to Hawaii from being depleted by the miles-long nets.

"This is probably the biggest thing that

has happened in aquatic conservation this century," said William Paty, chairman of the state Board of Land and Natural Resources. Paty also serves as chairman of the federal fishery management council for the Western Pacific region.

"First the Berlin Wall came down, and now the wall of death in the ocean is coming down."

The U.S. State Department is expected to announce Japan's about-face and acceptance of the drift-net ban today, the Associated

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# Japan: Agrees to ban destructive drift-nets

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Press reported from Washington, D.C.

The final obstacle to an agreement was removed when the Japanese cabinet approved a plan to compensate drift-net fishermen for the loss of that use of their vessels.

Paty said an international ban on drift-nets would end the indiscriminate harvesting of tuna and swordfish and the nets' threat to endangered Hawaiian mammals.

"This is very major step for the protection of and conservation of our species," Paty said. Japan, the world's largest user of drift-nets, made "a sub-



Paty

stantial concession" in agreeing to the ban, he said.

Earthtrust, a Hawaii-based international environmental group, is calling today Drift-net Victory Day.

"On the face of it, this is an incredible victory for the seas," said Sue White, director of Earthtrust's international drift-net campaign.

"This issue, which was virtually unknown in 1988 - and perhaps the greatest danger to the ocean - may now be ending."

The agreement will take the form of co-sponsorship of a new United Nations resolution phasing out use of drift-nets, with no exceptions, between Jan. 1 and Dec. 31, 1992.

Under a previous U.N. resolution to ban large-scale drift-nets, a ban would have gone into effect next June, but that prohibition included loopholes that could have allowed contin-

ued use under some circumstances.

Earthtrust, Greenpeace and other environmental groups have been working for three years to outlaw the nets, which stretch as long as 30 miles and decimate marine life in their path.

White, who recently returned from the United Nations, said the U.S.-Japan agreement will come under further U.N. discussion and efforts may be made to change it.

She warned that while U.S. officials refer to the agreement as a "binding international resolution," U.N. resolutions are not binding without enforcement.

Paty said he wants to see how Taiwan and Korea will react to the new pact. Taiwanese officials have told him they are willing to abide by it, he said.

Japan's fishing fleet includes

about 450 small-mesh vessels that fish primarily for red tuna in the North Pacific to the north and west of Hawaii.

Japan also has a large-mesh fleet that catches billfish and tuna close to Hawaii, according to Earthtrust.

Once a ban takes effect, Japanese vessels that have been using drift-nets might return to species-specific fishing methods used before the advent of drift-nets.

"They can go back to jigging," said Paty, referring to the practice of fishing for squid with lights and empty hooks. While the technique is less efficient, it does not threaten other species.

Members of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council will discuss new developments when they meet in Honolulu Dec. 16-18.

The Associated Press contributed to this report