

Press Releases: U.S. Signs Agreement To Prevent Unregulated Commercial Fishing on the High Seas of the Central Arctic Ocean

Media Note
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
October 1, 2018

The United States is pleased to be a signatory of the agreement to prevent unregulated commercial fishing on the high seas of the central Arctic Ocean. This is the first multilateral agreement of its kind to take a legally binding, precautionary approach to protect an area from commercial fishing before that fishing has begun. The signing ceremony will take place October 3 in Ilulissat, Greenland. Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and Fisheries William Gibbons-Fly will head the U.S. delegation from the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs.

Ice has traditionally covered the high seas of the central Arctic Ocean year-round. Recently, the melting of Arctic sea ice has left large areas of the high seas uncovered for much of the year. As a result, commercial fisheries in the central Arctic Ocean may become viable in areas where such activity was previously not possible. Prior to this agreement, no legally binding international agreement existed to manage potential fishing in the high seas of this region.

In 2009, the United States closed the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) north of Alaska to commercial fishing until such time as domestic fisheries managers have sufficient information about the ecosystem to allow fishing to proceed on a well-regulated basis. U.S. stakeholders, including the Alaska-based fishing industry, have been concerned foreign fishing vessels could begin fishing here in the foreseeable future. At a time when U.S. vessels cannot fish within the U.S. EEZ, the United States has negotiated this new fisheries agreement for the central Arctic Ocean that reduces the chance that foreign vessels will fish just beyond the U.S. EEZ.

Initial negotiations among the five coastal parties of the central Arctic Ocean—Canada, Denmark (for Greenland and the Faroe Islands), Norway, Russia, and the United States—resulted in the non-legally binding Oslo Declaration

signed on July 16, 2015. The Oslo Declaration recognized other governments may have an interest in potential Arctic fisheries. In December 2015 ten parties, including the five Oslo Declaration signatories, as well as China, Iceland, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and the European Union, entered into negotiations towards a legally-binding agreement. The negotiations toward this legally binding agreement concluded November 30, 2017.

For press inquiries, please contact OES-PA-DG@state.gov.

The Office of Website Management, Bureau of Public Affairs, manages this site as a portal for information from the U.S. State Department. External links to other Internet sites should not be construed as an endorsement of the views or privacy policies contained therein.