

Russian Senator Seeks Payback on Japan With Ban on Fishing

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An employee empties a bucket with sturgeon fry into a truck container at the Beloyarsky state fish hatchery in the village of Izykhskiye Kopi in Khakassia region, Russia.

A Russian senator wants to impose a full ban on drift-net fishing for Japan in retaliation for that country's sanctions against Russia over Ukraine, in a sign of deteriorating relations between the two neighbors.

Speaking at the Ninth International Fishing Congress in Vladivostok on Thursday, the chairman of the Federation Council's agricultural committee, Gennady Gorbunov, said it was time to consider a "comprehensive ban of Japanese drift-net fishing in Russia's exclusive economic zone," a statement posted on the Primorye region website said.

Since Russia's annexation of Crimea in March and its alleged support of separatists in the east of that country, a number of Western nations and Japan have brought sanctions against Russian individuals and entities believed to have close ties to the Kremlin.

But while Russia has responded with a sweeping ban on food imports from the U.S., the 28 EU

countries, Norway, Australia and Canada, it has yet to target Japan.

The head of the Federal Fishing Agency, Ilya Shestakov, who was also present at the congress, said that while Gorbunov's proposal deserved consideration it should be approached with caution.

"On the one hand the proposal would, of course, affect our fishing industry, but on the other hand it has a serious political character. Therefore, the proposal should be worked upon alongside colleagues from other departments, primarily the Foreign Ministry," Shestakov was cited as saying Thursday by state-run news agency RIA Novosti.

The adoption of a ban on Japanese drift-net boats in Russian waters would also imply breaching an agreement signed between the two countries in 1977 giving Japanese drift-net boats the right to fish in Russian waters, Shestakov added.

Drift netting is a commercial fishing practice that involves dragging a net through the surface layers of the water, rather than anchoring it to the bottom.

Relations between Japan and Russia have cooled over the past months, with Moscow upsetting Tokyo by carrying out military exercises in a chain of disputed islands in the Pacific.

The longstanding row over the islands — known as the Northern Territories in Japan and the Kuril Islands in Russia — has prevented the two former World War II foes from signing a formal peace treaty.

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