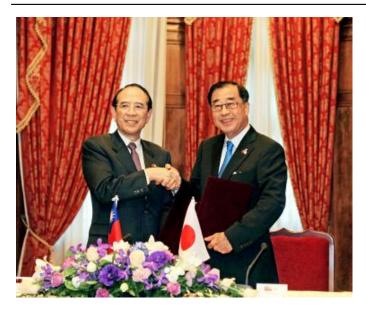
Written by Taipei Times Thursday, 11 April 2013 09:07 -



Association for East Asian Relations Chairman Liao Liou-yi, right, yesterday shakes hands with Interchange Association, Japan Chairman Mitsuo Ohashi as they sign an agreement that defines the two countries' respective fishing rights near the Diaoyutai Islands at the Taipei Guest House.

Photo: CNA

Taiwan and Japan yesterday inked a fisheries agreement in a bid to end controversies over fishing in waters surrounding the contested Diaoyutai Islands (□□□). The agreement includes an escape clause which Taipei said allows both sides to set aside disputes over their competing sovereignty claims.

The agreement assured Taiwanese vessels an intervention-free fishing zone in waters between 27° north latitude and the Sakishima Islands, Okinawa Prefecture, and gave Taiwan an additional fishing zone of 1,400 square nautical miles (4,800km2) outside Taiwan's temporary enforcement line, government officials said.

Under the deal, fishing vessels from both countries can operate in a large area within the designated zone without being subject to the jurisdiction of the other side, while a smaller area of the zone, where Japanese fishing vessels frequently operate, is under joint management by the two governments.

Provisions under the agreement do not apply to waters within 12 nautical miles — a state's territorial waters — surrounding the Diaoyutai Islands, because the islands are claimed by both Taiwan and Japan, which calls them the Senkaku Islands.

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China also claims sovereignty over the Diaoyutais. Japan and China signed a fisheries agreement in 1997, which took effect in 2000, under which both sides co-manage waters above 27° north latitude.

At the signing ceremony at the Taipei Guest House, Association of East Asian Relations Chairman Liao Liou-yi (☐☐☐) and Interchange Association, Japan Chairman Mitsuo Ohashi hailed the agreement, which they said marked a big step forward in bilateral relations.

The negotiations yesterday were the 17th round since talks started in August 1996.

Taipei and Tokyo initiated fishery talks following incidents of Taiwanese fishing boats being seized, detained or expelled by the Japan Coast Guard after Tokyo ratified the UN Law of the Sea Treaty in 1996 and set up a 200 nautical mile exclusive economic zone that included waters surrounding the Diaoyutais.

Ohashi said it was "with great pleasure" that the deal was finally signed.

The primary goals were to "maintain peace and stability in East China Sea" and to "strengthen the existing friendly relations with Taiwan," he said.

At a press conference after the signing ceremony, Minister of Foreign Affairs David Lin ([] []] said that the agreement did not address the competing claims over the Diaoyutais, as both governments agreed to "set aside the dispute."

As stated in Article 4, provisions that both sides have agreed to under the deal have no effect on each side's sovereignty claims over the Diaoyutais, Lin said, adding that the escape clause was written into the agreement at Taipei's insistence.

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"We did not back down one bit over the sovereignty issue in the talks," Lin said.

Waters within 12 nautical miles surrounding the Diaoyutais were exempted from the agreement because "we insisted that the area is our territorial sea, while Japan upheld its position" that it is theirs, Lin said.

Coast Guard Administration Minister Wang Jinn-wang ([][][]) called on Japanese and Chinese fishing vessels not to operate in waters within the 12 nautical miles surrounding the Diaoyutais and vowed to adopt appropriate measures against Chinese and Japanese fishing vessels to protect the rights of Taiwanese fishermen.

Under the agreement, Taiwan and Japan also agreed to establish a fisheries commission to discuss other issues, including the delineation of overlapping waters in their respective exclusive economic zones above 27º north latitude and waters south of Sakishima Islands, on an annual basis.

Meanwhile, China yesterday expressed concern about the new agreement.

"We are extremely concerned about Japan and Taiwan discussing and signing a fishing agreement," Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman Hong Lei (□□) told a daily news briefing.

"We hope that Japan earnestly abide by its promises on the Taiwan issue and act cautiously and appropriately," she said.

Additional reporting by Reuters

History of negotiations

