

Pirate Fishermen Turned Over to Chinese

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The U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Rush shadows the pirate fishing vessel Da Cheng. Coast Guard photo

Jay Barrett/KMXT

The high-seas driftnetter the U.S. Coast Guard chased across the North Pacific Ocean has been turned over to Chinese Fishery Law Enforcement. The crew from the Hawaii-based cutter Rush, which had been patrolling Alaska waters, boarded the ship, identified as the Da Cheng, just over two weeks ago and found 30 metric tons of illegally-caught albacore tuna and six metric tons of shark and shark fin on board.

While in Kodiak, Coast Guard Admiral Robert Papp called the 177-foot gillnetter a pirate ship, prompting Louisiana Senator Mary Landrieu to call for prosecution of not only the crew, but of the illegal seafood's buyers.

Capt. Diane Durham, commanding officer of the Cutter Rush, shakes hands with a China Fishery Law Enforcement Command officer after providing documentation and information in the transfer of custody of the suspected high seas drift net fishing vessel Da Cheng Aug. 14, 2012. U.S. Coast Guard photo

High seas

driftnetting has been outlawed by international treaty for 20 years. The 10-mile nets the Da Cheng and other illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing boats efficiently catch tuna, but also scoop up everything in their path. Some nets are lost and drift for years, killing thousands of fish.

The crew of

the Rush turned the Da Cheng over to the Chinese about 850 miles east of Tokyo.