

Coast Guard says 200 mile limit appears to be working

From Our Anchorage Bureau

Maybe, just maybe, Alaskan fishermen can breathe a little easier now.

America's 200-mile fishery zone, set up to control, and in some cases, eliminate, foreign fishing off her coasts, seems to be working.

U.S. Coast Guard Commander Ralph Giffin told the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, meeting in Anchorage last week, that foreign vessels seem to be bending over backwards to comply with the letter and spirit of the new American law.

The law, known as the Fishery Conservation and Management Act, also created the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, and seven other regional councils to manage

American fisheries.

Under the act, foreign vessels may not fish within 200 miles of American shores unless they hold a permit from the U.S. Government. Although there was confusion and several important unanswered questions about how the act was going to be enforced, Giffin said most of the problems were worked out by March 1, the date the zone went into effect.

"Most importantly, we were completely in the dark about the attitude on board the 115 Soviet and Japanese fishing vessels off the Alaska coast. Would they obey the law or not?

"After three weeks experience with this new law, we now have, I think, a fairly accurate perspective of the attitudes on board the Japanese and Soviet fishing vessels. In two

words—almost perfect.

We have had no difficulty whatever in communicating with or boarding any of their fishing vessels," Giffin said.

Minor Violations

Giffin did report to the council that there had been two minor violations of the fishing zone, both by Soviet vessels. One of the vessels had several illegal halibut, the other small amounts of crab and salmon.

Although details of the second violation were not yet available, Giffin said the vessel with the halibut could be fined up to \$25,000.

"An interesting sidelight to the incident was the way it was handled by the Soviet fleet commander. After the Coast Guard left boarding party left

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limit ...

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the MYS VORONINA, the ship could have legally resumed fishing. However, the fleet commander directed the MYS VORONINA to return to Russia with more than 2½ months remaining on her trip. Further evidence, I believe, that the Soviets are trying hard to comply with the law," Giffin said.