

U.S. must crack down on bycatches

by Sen. John Binkley
for the Tundra Times

The following excerpts are taken from testimony presented before the Senate Committee on Science, Commerce and Transportation during hearings held earlier this month on high seas salmon interceptions.

OPINION

The legal and illegal interception of Alaska salmon and steelhead on the high seas has created serious conservation and management problems in Alaska's fisheries.

As co-chairman of the Alaska Senate Committee on High Seas Interceptions, I have heard fishermen all across the state describe how their directed commercial and subsistence salmon harvests have been severely reduced or eliminated as a result of these interceptions; how the international sales of salmon harvested by American fishermen and sold by American processors have been undercut; and how the state's conservation-oriented management program as well as the state's hatchery rebuilding program, in which we have invested hundreds of millions of dollars, have been defeated.

In addition, as the state legislator representing much of the coast of Western Alaska, as well as the entire drainages of the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers, I have seen the income that my constituents derive from fishing diminish substantially due to the foreign interception of salmon originating in these areas.

Most of the fishermen I represent rely on salmon as the mainstay of their subsistence way of life, supplemented with the small amount of cash earned by the sale of some of those fish com-

mercially. The average annual income in this region is little more than \$5,000 to \$6,000, and the economic losses caused by foreign interceptions have a significant impact.

I believe reauthorization of the Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act this year provides a unique forum to hasten the end to the piracy on the high seas that now occurs. In fact, the Alaska Legislature passed a resolution which seeks to strengthen the United States' hand in protecting its anadromous species on the high seas.

The Legislature also asked Congress to call for the end of high seas gillnet fishing beyond the Exclusive Economic Zones of all nations by 1992. I believe the State Department's recent agreements with Japan and Taiwan over management of their squid driftnet fleets highlight the importance of such a declaration.

Minimal enforcement and monitoring provisions, coupled with too few observers, put almost the entire enforcement burden upon the United States, not the foreign nation.

The cost of a meaningful, scientifically significant monitoring and enforcement effort is expensive, and so far has received little support from the federal government. For this reason, I believe it is time to stop trying to regulate these foreign fisheries and instead, to call for an international ban on all high seas driftnetting.

The United States should focus all of its efforts on forging a new international treaty devoted to the protection and conservation of such marine resources as anadromous fish, marine mammals and seabirds. Such a treaty should detail a new regulatory regime for high seas management outside each nation's Exclusive Economic Zones.

Management of fisheries within our own 200-mile limit should also be addressed through reauthorization of the

Magnuson Act. The rapid Americanization of the groundfish fisheries within our waters has led to fierce competition on the fishing grounds and to increased concern over the current management system and its ability to protect the resource.

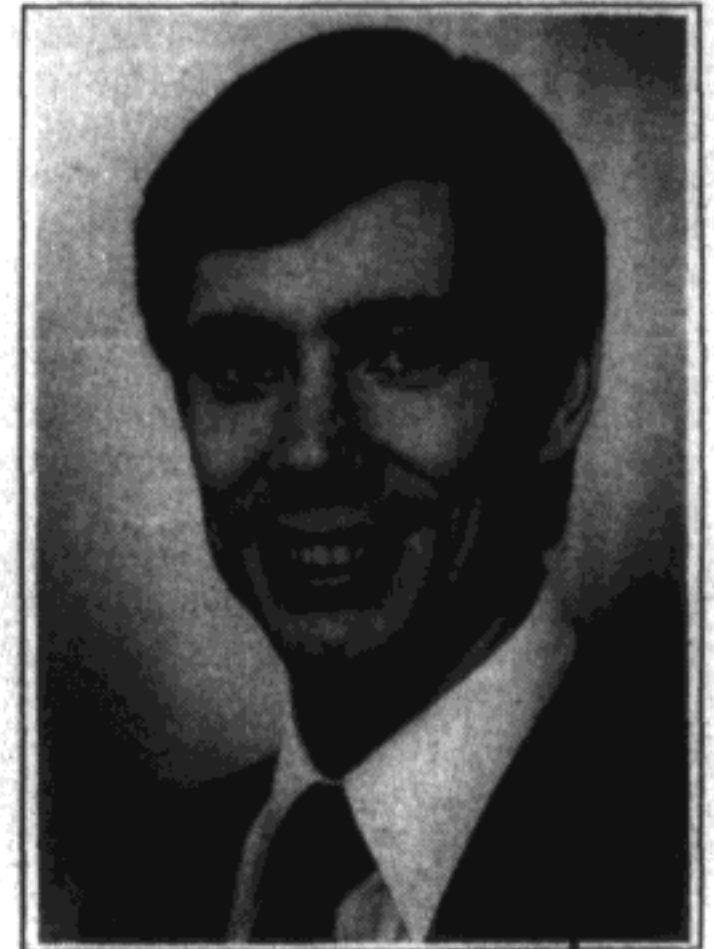
The large boats needed to participate in these fisheries require huge capital investments that have not been available for the most part to nearby coastal communities which have had an historic interest in participating in these fisheries.

Other nations in the Pacific have been forced to grapple with similar problems, and such nations as Australia, New Zealand and even Japan have made some provision to allow entrance into these fisheries by their smaller coastal communities.

Commercial fishing generates more than 7 percent of the total state income and 27 percent of the personal income of the private sector. But in rural regions of the state, where people are often lucky to make \$5,000 a year, income from fishing represents a much greater portion of the community's total income. Few other cash jobs exist. Historically, these communities have depended upon the resources of the sea for hundreds of years.

The Magnuson Act should be amended to give the regional councils the authority to provide additional opportunities for traditional fishing communities which would allow them eventually to participate in either the harvesting or processing sectors of the fisheries.

When foreign fleets fished in U.S. waters, they were required to have 100 percent observer coverage so that fisheries managers could have reliable data on catch numbers. Since the American fleets have now taken over the groundfish fisheries, however, we no longer have accurate information on the harvest of either the target fisheries or the species caught as



bycatch.

What information we do have indicates that the bycatch of halibut, crab and herring are so high that in many cases, Alaskans are prohibited from having directed fisheries on these same species.

In almost every case, there is no logical reason that trawlers should have such high bycatch percentages.

Congress should provide incentives to modernize current fishing techniques in order to minimize and eliminate these bycatch species.

In addition, statutory language should be included which mandates the conservation of existing, fully utilized fisheries. Historic fisheries should not be displaced by newer fisheries with more mobile gear.

The Magnuson Act was a truly historic piece of federal fisheries legislation which established the United States as the world leader in rational marine fisheries management.

Reauthorization of the Magnuson Act this year provides a unique opportunity to further promote the conservation and rational management of these most important resources.