

Gravel's TT Report

By Mike Gravel
U.S. Senator, Alaska

The fishing industry is in dire need of federal assistance. As the competition increases and foreign nations invade our waters, the supply dwindles. More fish are being caught than can be replaced through the normal reproductive cycle.

WIDE-RANGING EFFECTS

It's a problem that hits all of us, whether we live along the coast or deep in the Interior. Everyone depends on fish, in one way or another, as a basic commodity.

We in Alaska consider fishing one of our most important industries, providing food, jobs, and income.

Yet it is usually considered a seasonal occupation; the pay is low, and the dangers are great.

CONGRESS ACTS

We in the U.S. Senate are making serious efforts to improve the lot of the Alaska fisherman. Some of our efforts have already borne fruit, while others represent a good start and should be a great help, in the near future.

ELIMINATE IMPORT TAX ON FISH NETS

The latest effort is a bill to end the tariff on imported fish nets. As a co-sponsor of that bill, I'm glad to report that it is receiving backing from both Democrats and Republicans.

The high import tax, in the form of a "protective tariff," is an unnecessary, outdated, and discriminatory burden on fishermen. At a recent National Federation of Fishermen meeting, members approved a resolution calling upon Congress to eliminate these tariff restrictions. Most of these nets, incidentally, are constructed of synthetic fibers in Japan, then shipped to the U.S.

RISING COSTS

Even with the tariff, the cost has risen dramatically. Over-all, the price for fish nets has gone up from about \$3 a pound in the early sixties to about \$13 a pound today. But the pay for fishermen has increased nowhere near that rate. If costs continue to rise, and the tariff is not removed, even more residents will give up on fishing as a livelihood.

And Alaska's fishermen get gouged twice, not only do they face the combined taxes-and-cost-increases, but they also suffer from long time lags between the day they put in their order

for netting and the day of actual delivery.

FUEL AND THE FISHERMAN

I'm pleased with the positive response from the Federal Energy Office to my requests for special consideration for Alaskan fishermen. Twice, I've urged the F.E.O. to base fuel allocations for fishermen on present actual need, rather than on the complicated system devised in F.E.O. headquarters, which is based on past gas use. Well, the F.E.O. finally agreed to the request; fishing will get fuel allocations amounting to 100 per cent of current needs.

200-MILE FISHING ZONE

For some time now, we've been working to get a 200-mile fishing zone, to control the taking of salt-water fish from our waters. The Senate Commerce Committee has held hearings on this issue. During my testimony before the commission, I pointed out that new technology has meant bigger takes by foreign distant-water fishing vessels into our waters.

We can't afford to wait too much longer, while our fishing stocks become more and more depleted. The salmon run in Alaska may worsen — we face the threat of the destruction of the major industry, both in Alaska and nationwide.