

WASHINGTON COMMENTS

Sen. Frank Murkowski



THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE MAGNUSON ACT

Ten years ago, the United States adopted one of the most significant pieces of legislation in Alaska history – the Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

Signed into law on April 13, 1976, this act has since added hundreds of millions of dollars to the economy of Alaska and the United States.

Two men played vital roles in the passage of the act – Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska and former Senator Warren Magnuson of Washington. Without their efforts it's doubtful this important legislation would have become a reality.

Senator Stevens originally introduced the legislation and later worked closely with Senator Magnuson to ensure its passage in Congress.

In 1980, Senator Stevens sponsored an amendment to rename the act to the Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act to commemorate the Washington Senator's dedicated work toward developing a national policy on fishery development.

Prior to the Magnuson Act, foreign fishermen from Japan, the U.S.S.R. and South Korea were fishing as close as 12 miles off the Alaska coast, catching billions of pounds of our bottomfish (cod, pollock, perch and sole). In 1972, foreign catches off Alaska accounted for 2.4 million metric tons worth more than \$210 million.

However, because of the Magnuson Act, foreigners now can fish within our 200 mile zone only by permit and take only fish that American fishermen cannot utilize. The decline of foreign bottomfish catches off Alaska and the increase in American catches has been staggering. Foreign catches off Alaska have decreased steadily from an annual rate of \$212 million in 1972 to \$106 million last year. U.S. fishermen have increased their take from zero to over \$92 million last year alone.

The United States has now become the fourth largest fish producing nation in the world.

Before the 1976 act, the North Pacific's fishery stocks were decreasing at an alarming rate, to the detriment of U.S. fishing interests. The Magnuson Act reversed that trend and accomplished several important objectives:

- It extended the United States' fishery management jurisdiction to 200 miles and immediately halted unregulated foreign fishing by Japan, the U.S.S.R. and South Korea. The act also gave the United States control over an additional two million square miles of ocean and 15 to 20 percent of the world's fishery resources;
- It established fishery management councils to regulate and manage the domestic and foreign fishing to prevent overfishing;
- It established management guidelines to encourage and give preference to domestic fishermen and processors in the development of our newly acquired fishery resources;
- In addition, U.S. observers must be onboard most foreign fishing vessels and the U.S. Coast Guard has increased surveillance of our waters and increased penalties for all violations.

The Northwest and Alaska bottomfish processing industry are coming on line and slowly but surely displacing the foreign processing of our fish. Bottomfish processing is expected to triple this year over last year's production. Alaska's shoreside processing reached \$38 million in 1985 and is expected to increase this year. Our second surimi processing plant has just opened in Dutch Harbor and a third plant is scheduled to open later this year. A surimi factory trawler is also being planned. And with rising prices for cod and surimi, lower fuel prices and low interest rates, we can expect to see a surge of American processing activity and development in Alaska in the next couple of years.

But much still needs to be accomplished. Along with Senator Stevens, I have been working to increase the marketing opportunities for Alaska seafood, as our shoreside plants process previously unutilized bottomfish. This includes the creation of the National Seafood Marketing Council, which would establish a coordinated national program to expand markets for fisheries products. It's important we continue to develop new approaches to stimulating our nation's fishery development.

I have also sponsored a surimi tariff bill which would begin to equalize the marketing positions of U.S. and Japanese surimi processors.

In legislation currently before the Senate Commerce Committee, I have cosponsored amendments to the Magnuson Act which would:

- Implement a 50 percent cut in bottomfish allocations to nations found guilty of high seas salmon fishing violations;
- Phase out all foreign fishing in our 200 mile zone by 1990;
- Extend U.S. management jurisdiction beyond the 200 mile zone for fish stocks that straddle the 200 mile line, allowing for more comprehensive management of these fish;
- Increase foreign fishing fees to reflect the true value of our fishery resources and put the U.S. fishery industry on a more equal operating cost basis;
- Encourage the use of U.S. support services by foreign nations.

There is an explosion in U.S. seafood consumption taking place across America, with more and more Americans eating seafood for health and nutritional reasons. Americans are demanding high quality, inexpensive seafood, and providing a golden opportunity for U.S. fishermen and processors to benefit. The Magnuson Act has given us control of the fishery resource, now let's take advantage of it and totally "Americanize" the fisheries within our 200 mile limit.