

Japanese Taking Many Salmon

Gordon Jensen, of the Alaska Board of Fish and Game, said recently that the Japanese mothership fishery took 410,150 king salmon and the Japanese landbased drift gill net fishery took 275,060 king salmon in 1964. Most of these fish were probably of Alaskan origin, Jensen said.

This catch exceeded the catch of 639,000 king salmon taken by commercial fishermen in Alaska during the same year, Jensen went on to say.

The Board, in a letter to Clarence Pautzke, Chairman of the U.S. Section to the International North Pacific Fisheries Commission, outlined reasons for its concern and requested the Commission determine to what extent the Japanese high seas fisheries are exploiting king salmon of North America, with special reference to king salmon originating in Alaskan streams that drain into the Bering Sea.

The letter to Pautzke pointed out that the average weight of offshore catches of king salmon, mostly immatures, is only six pounds per fish as compared to an average weight of twenty pounds per fish when mature.

If the king salmon taken by Japanese offshore fisheries in 1964 had been allowed to mature, the catch would have yielded almost 14 million pounds instead of only a bit more than 4 million pounds, Jensen said.

Truman Emberg, Board member from Dillingham, added that studies indicate about 30 per cent of chum and red salmon initially captured and kill-

ed by high seas gill nets drop out of these nets and are not recovered. He said this loss is probably even higher for the larger sized king salmon which are not effectively gilled by the small-meshed high seas nets.

Jensen said that a report given to the Board by Alaska Department of Fish and Game personnel left little doubt that the Japanese high seas fishery, particularly in the Bering Sea area, is catching significant numbers of king salmon that are produced in the Bristol Bay, Kuskokwim River, Yukon River, and Norton Sound drainages.

According to the report, over half of the 410,150 kings taken by the mothership fleet in 1964 were caught in Bering Sea waters. Review of past catches shows that large catches of king salmon have been taken whenever the

mothership fleet fished extensively in the Bering Sea.

Since Asian production of king salmon is negligible, the large catch made in the Bering Sea during 1964 probably indicates that considerable numbers of king salmon from Alaska's Bering Sea drainages were taken, Jensen said.

The Board's letter went on to say that research information, although limited, indicates that a majority of the king salmon captured in offshore waters are immature and are not due to return to their spawning grounds for one to three years. Therefore, the effects of the large high seas catch made in 1964 may result in smaller runs to Alaskan streams in 1966 and 1967.

The Board expressed its concern about the lack of information and research efforts

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regarding the continental origin and distribution of king salmon in offshore waters. Jensen said that only about 2,800 king salmon have been tagged and released in offshore waters by Japanese, United States, and Canadian research vessels between 1955 and 1963.

In the Bering Sea, where the largest Japanese catches have been made, only about 200 kings were tagged and released. In its letter, the Board requested that the U.S. Section also initiate an expanded research program and that every effort be made to obtain biological data from the Japanese high seas fishery for king salmon.