

# United States must protect fisheries

by Harold Sparck  
for the Tundra Times

The United States, Japan and Canada recently ended the first round of 1989 International North Pacific Fisheries Convention negotiations on the upcoming ocean salmon fishing season by Japan.

## OPINION

At the meeting, Japan demanded 1989 salmon concessions from the United States and Canada for its fishermen beyond 200 miles. Japan's catcher boats that are used to deliver to floating factory ships — called "motherships" — are currently unemployed.

The Japanese Mothership Council, composed of boat owners, announced last fall that it would suspend operation of these ships this year. These businessmen cited the reduced allocation of U.S. and Canadian salmon being made available for harvest by the Soviet government.

The council also cited the successful marine mammal litigation brought by Alaska Natives and national environmental groups that prevents Japanese catcher boats from entering the U.S. 200-mile zone to fish for U.S. salmon.

Japan is asking the United States for several changes in the current International North Pacific Fisheries Convention. The Japanese have requested

U.S. and Canadian permission to put freezing units on 80 former catcher boats. Once retrofitted, Japan asks for these boats to be allowed to fish as land-based boats.

Japan proposes that these boats fish in the former mothership fishing areas. These zones are located below the U.S. zone in the North Pacific and in the Doughnut area of the central Bering Sea.

Finally, Japan asks the Bush administration to seek congressional approval of a marine mammal permit for these boats to re-enter the U.S. 200-mile zone. An alternative would be to allow Japanese boats to re-enter a fishing area below the U.S. zone in the North Pacific that was closed in 1978.

In exchange for all of these concessions by the United States, Japan is willing to offer less than 1 percent observer coverage on the 700-plus boats in its squid fleet. This fleet is known to harvest 3 to 5 percent salmon as bycatch. This harvest rate equals 20,000 tons of immature salmon a year.

At 3.5 pounds per immature fish average, this tonnage equals 11.4 million salmon. That is more than all the fish harvested for commercial and subsistence purposes in Bush Alaska, not including Bristol Bay.

That rate does not include the two immature salmon that drop from ocean gillnets dead for very immature salmon harvested. The ocean mortality of immature salmon now equals 33 million fish by Japan's squid fleet

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alone.

Japan considers the exchange fair.

In the event that the United States does not take this Japanese offer, the Japanese negotiators threatened to embargo U.S. fish products in 1989. Japan next threatened to send its salmon fishing fleet into the eastern portion of the Doughnut to deliberately fish Western Alaskan kings, reds and chums, and into the closed areas of the North Pacific to target all forms of Alaskan salmon.

While the U.S. administration blinked at Japan's hard-line approach, Congressman Don Young issued a press release denouncing Japan's threats.

"Not only am I opposed to allow the Japanese fishermen back into Alaska waters, but I will continue to work for more severe penalties against foreign fishermen who violate our fishing

laws," he said.

Young took special notice of the level of Japanese threats.

"I'm extremely disturbed about the threats by some Japanese officials that they intend to embargo U.S. fish products or ignore the INPFC and fish in areas where our salmon are found," he said. He then went on to proclaim that he intends to make it very clear to the Japanese that will not sit by and allow the INPFC to be violated.

The United States should not accept threats from a nation whose vessels are killing thousands of salmon, birds, marine mammals on the high seas, according to Young.

Whether the Bush administration agrees with Young and Alaskan salmon interests or seeks to "normalize" relations with Japan by giving away U.S. salmon is still unclear.