

Fishermen, processors join forces to protect salmon

by Harold Sparck
for the Tundra Times

BETHEL — American salmon fishermen and processors sat down for a historic meeting in Anchorage last month. On the agenda was stopping the high seas interception of salmon by ocean gillnets. These nets are fished by three Oriental nations: Japan, Korea and Taiwan.

OPINION

The fisheries of Alaska and the Pacific Northwest have been exposed since the turn of the century to high seas interception. Japanese fleets fishing off of Naknek in the mid-'30s were so extensive that a Coast Guard observer radioed the nets stretched "as far as the eye can see."

Japan's fleets in this century have been recently joined by "squid" fleets of Korea and Taiwan. None of these fleets are regulated by their flag country. Nor are the activities of these fleets controlled by their own governments.

These fleets are free to roam the ocean, placing their nets in cold streams of water in the greater North Pacific Basin where salmon are found.

American industry has identified from 10,000 to 30,000 tons of salmon being taken on this growing black market. The fish are processed in the Orient, and sold to European markets. The input of these illegally taken salmon reduces the market for terminal stream salmon fisheries in North

America.

During the unification meeting, participants were reminded that Japan was up to its old tricks again. Working through sympathetic Americans in the American section of the International North Pacific Fisheries Commission and Reagan's State Department, Japan's salmon fishing interests will try one more time this year to gain access to their old fishing grounds within the U.S. 200-mile zone in 1989.

Japan's salmon fisheries are desperate. The Japanese have lost in the last 10 years their ability to predict U.S. foreign policy in the North Pacific Ocean.

In 1976, the U.S. Congress took fishing matters away from the president. The Congress passed the Magnuson 200-mile act. Harvey Samuelson, Truman Emberg, Jesse Foster and John Hanson led the efforts of Western Alaskans that resulted in Japan's fleet being removed from 80 percent of the U.S. Bering Sea Zone by 1978. Western Alaskan reds and coho quickly recovered.

The Kokechik and Qaluyaat Fisherman's Associations of the delta claimed that Japanese gillnets drown endangered marine mammals when harvesting Western Alaskan salmon in this zone. Their successful court suit denied Japan's salmon fleets any access to the U.S. Bering Sea Zone in 1987. Chums and kings are now improving in run strength.

Once the directed salmon fisheries of Japan are removed from the ocean, then all terminal stream fisheries can concentrate on removing the "squid" gillnets.