

U. S. Fishermen Speak Out

By JEFFREY R. RICHARDSON

"They're going great guns, they're just oushining themselves."

With these words, Mark Hutton described what is evident everywhere you look: In spite of some doubts about the effectiveness of the 200-mile fishing limit, American fisherman have no intention of letting foreign fishermen beat them to the stocks that are now clearly under American jurisdiction.

Hutton is deputy director of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, which held its seventh monthly meeting May 26-7 in Anchorage. The council was created to manage fisheries in Alaskan waters between three and 200 miles offshore and prepare management plans for each species of fish and shellfish that are taken commercially.

Extensive public testimony and information brought to the council's attention by its own staff indicate that Americans are prepared or preparing to catch more fish of more species than ever before. A few examples:

—The newly organized Alaskan Longline Fishing Association told the council it wants to fish and market black cod off southeastern Alaska, a new cod area for domestic fishermen. A significant rise in the price of cod and healthy stocks are responsible for interest in this fishery, now only exploited by the foreign fleet.

—American fishermen to date have caught approximately 2,600 metric tons of herring in the Bering Sea, two and a half times what

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they were expected to catch. The council has begun to explore the possibility of reducing the foreign quota of herring in mid-year to account for the dramatic American catch and avoid exceeding the total allowable catch for herring established by the Preliminary Management Plan;

—Always a hot item on the council's agenda, tanner crab were the subject of testimony by several representatives of crab fishermen and processors who revealed that Americans had caught at least as many tanners as they had projected if not more. The council, in making recommendations to the Department of Commerce for the Preliminary Management Plan rejected industry estimates for the domestic fishery.

—The American pursuit of pollock and other bottom fish again absorbed the council's attention. Apparently making good their promise to plunge into the shore-based bottom fish processing business, New

England Fish Company reported at the meeting that it will have facilities on line capable of handling 15-30 million pounds of bottom fish per year by late August or early September. Charles Perkins, vice-president of NEFCO said new processing equipment had cost a half million dollars; NEFCO's bottomfish effort will begin with three to five catcher vessels.

The NEFCO plan is a response at least in part to a proposal by the Korean Marine Industry Development Corporation to buy American caught pollock. For the most part, this proposal has gone begging for support for economic and biological reasons. The council rejected applications by the Koreans to operate floating processors and transports for pollock in the 200-mile zone. So far, the U.S. Department of Commerce and State have upheld that decision:

"The State Department tentatively said they were accepting the recommendations of this council and upholding the coun-

cil's positions on rejection of permits for the Korean venture. The permits have not been issued, so its a good bet that they won't," Hutton said.

The only interest to testify before the council in favor of the Korean-type venture so far has been Mrs. Paul's Sticks, of Philadelphia. Claiming to purchase 70% of all pollock caught in the world, the firm is fearful that between the time foreign pollock fishermen are eased out and gear up to purchase pollock in the quantities they want.

Although the council rejection of the Korean permit applications was not and is not unanimous, the issue of tanner crab allocations has been more heated.

At the behest of the Alaska Board of Fisheries, American fishermen left the tanner grounds two months ahead of schedule, after catching more than even they had predicted. Although furious that their Japanese competitors continue to fish, American crabbers have

compiled with the emergency closure by the Board of Fisheries because the tanners are moulting, resulting in poor meat quality and higher incidental mortality for crabs caught but not processed.

Under the preliminary management plan for tanner crab, Japanese fishermen are subject to area closure on the grounds, but not time closures, and thus are not bound to quit before the end of the season.

Because of their frustration over council rejection of tanner catch estimates, several industry representatives asked the council to accept industry testimony in the future based on the performance of past recommendations.

The issue of herring allocations promises to heat up quickly in the near future. Although foreigners were excluded from near-shore herring fishery, Americans still were only allocated 1,000 metric tons. Of this amount, it was expected that Native villages along Alaskan's western coast would harvest the bulk. In-

stead, both subsistence and an intensive domestic herring fishery blossomed. Fearful that the Total Allowance catch of herring might be exceeded, the council adopted the following motion at its May meeting:

"It is now a certainty that the U.S. harvest of herring in the Bering Sea will far exceed the 1,000 metric tons estimated in the preliminary management plan. Should the foreign allocation be harvested, it will exceed the total allowable catch (TAC). At the present time 9,000 tons of this foreign allocation remain to be taken, but not further catch effort is expected before November. Therefore the Council feels it essential that all or part of the unfilled foreign allocations be cancelled. Specific recommendations relative to such action will be developed at the regular June Council meeting based on the performance of the U.S. fishery as of that time."

Although the question of year reductions of foreign has not yet been fully explored the council's consensus is that such reductions or other changes in the Preliminary Management plans will inevitably be appropriate under some circumstances and they have begun the task of convincing the Secretary of Commerce.

"They're going to pursue it with that kind of vigor," Hutton said.

Other fisheries developments at the council's May meeting are summarized below:

Preliminary drafts of two management plans, one for the Gulf of Alaska trawl fishery and one for tanner crab were submitted to the council for review. Council approval is expected at the June meeting, with hearings on the drafts scheduled for August.

The high seas salmon plan and the ocean troll salmon plan are expected to be submitted for review in July, with hearings scheduled for October.

King crab plans are to be submitted in September, with hearings scheduled for December.

If these schedules hold, all plans could be implemented by the first half of 1978.

The council recommended that permits not be used to two Soviet research ships unless the research was totally coordinated with and sanctioned by U.S. officials.

The National Marine Fisheries Service reported that as of May 4th permits to fish off Alaska have been issued to 372 Japanese fishing vessels and 70 support vessels; 6 Polish vessels; 4 Taiwanese fishing vessels; 74 Soviet fishing vessels and 56 support vessels.