

# Loans for commercial fisherman

WASHINGTON—Sen. Mike Gravel, D-Alaska, recently joined in cosponsoring legislation to provide for incentive loans to help stimulate the commercial fishing industry.

The bill Gravel is cosponsoring with Sen. William D. Hathaway, D-Maine, would establish a \$250 million Commercial Fisheries Fund to be administered by the Secretary of Commerce through May of 1990.

The fund would provide long term loans of 15 years for fishing vessels and 25 years for shoreside facilities to help increase the harvest in underutilized fisheries. The loans would be available at interest rates not to exceed the government's cost of money.

The loans could be used for the purchase, construction and rehabilitation of new or used fishing vessels and shoreside facilities for use in underutilized fisheries.

Other loans at the government's cost of money would

be available to finance additionally needed shoreside facilities in areas not classified as underutilized.

Underutilized fisheries are species of groups of species of fish that are not harvested to their potential.

Very low interest loans for up to three years would be available in fisheries affected by economic disasters.

Gravel said "It is essential that we provide some kind of financial assistance to our fishermen to help them improve their capability of harvesting the nation's fish resources. Now that the 200-mile fisheries zone is law, we want to assure that Alaska fishermen and processors will receive full benefits of our fisheries."

The revolving fund designed to assist fishermen and processors in upgrading their vessels and equipment, "will provide the kind of incentives needed to help our fishing fleets compete for the fish

resources of our oceans," Gravel said.

The major existing financial assistance program for fishermen is the Fisheries Loan Fund administered by the National Marine Fisheries Service. It has had only \$13 million appropriated to it since its creation in 1956. In 1973 the administration placed a moratorium on this fund.

The General Accounting Office, in a 1975 study, condemned the fund on the basis of inefficient operation, due to lack of specific loan criteria and lack of funding, and noted a need for new legislation.