

JAPANESE FISHERIES OFF ALASKA, 1975

Japanese fisheries off Alaska during 1975 included: a trawl fishery along the Continental Shelf edge in the Gulf of Alaska along the Aleutian Islands chain and the Bering Sea by independent stern trawlers; a trawl fishery by factory ship fleets on and along the Continental Shelf edge in the central and eastern Bering Sea; a longline fishery for sablefish principally in the Gulf of Alaska; a fishery for crabs in the eastern Bering Sea; a fishery for herring along the western coast of Alaska and a high seas salmon fishery west of 175°W longitude.

Groundfish Trawl Fishery

Japanese trawling for groundfish in the Gulf of Alaska was continuous throughout the year and conducted by independent stern trawlers. The trawlers fished along the Continental Shelf edge from off the southeastern coast to south of the Shumagin Islands in the western Gulf of Alaska. The effort was fairly constant with eight to eleven trawlers except during September when the number of vessels decreased to six. Principal species taken in the Gulf of Alaska were rockfish, sablefish and pollock.

Trawling along the Aleutian Islands chain was conducted by independent stern trawlers continuously from late March. The effort was concentrated principally in the central Aleutians in the area of Seguam-Amukta Passes and in the western Aleutians off the Rat and Near Islands groups. Five to six vessels fished in the central Aleutian area from April through September, and two to four vessels fished the western Aleutians during May, and in late June and July the number of trawlers in the western Aleutians area increased to fifteen and then stabilized to an average of ten for the remainder of the period. The major portion of the catch along the Aleutian Islands chain continued to be rockfish.

Independent stern trawlers fished year-round along the Continental Shelf edge for groundfish in the Bering Sea. During the winter and spring months the effort was confined to the area west and northwest of the Pribilof Islands due to Japanese domestic regulations. This was a departure from previous years when the principal winter effort was between Unimak Pass and the Pribilof Islands. In mid-May when the domestic regulations permitted, the trawlers then fished along the entire Continental Shelf edge from Unimak Pass to far northwest of the Pribilof Islands. The effort was fairly constant with the average number of trawlers being 30 from May through September. The peak month was April with 35, February and March with 32, and 15 in January the lowest. As in previous years the trawlers principal catch was pollock.

During 1975 five factory ship fleets fished for Alaska pollock on and along the Continental Shelf edge in the Bering Sea this was a reduction of one fleet from previous years. This large fishery began in late January by one factory ship fleet which was joined by two additional fleets in April. The remaining two fleets joined the annual expedition in June bringing the total effort to 101 trawlers. All five fleets remained in the Bering Sea through October. As with the independent stern trawlers fishing for pollock in the Bering Sea the Japanese domestic regulations have altered the normal fishing pattern from previous years. Usually the fleets fish southwest of the Pribilof Islands in the winter and spring months, and then move northward as the pollock migrate on to the Continental Shelf. During 1975 all five fleets operated northwest and west of the Pribilof Islands until August when they shifted to the area between Unimak Pass and the Pribilof Islands. During September three of those fleets again returned to far northwest of the Pribilof Islands.

The annual winter fishery for flounder began in October 1975 by a factory ship fleet and seven accompanying trawlers on the Continental Shelf north of Unimak Island in the eastern Bering Sea. The fishery was continued by a single factory ship fleet until early January 1976 when it was joined by a second factory ship.

It is estimated that the 1975 catch by independent stern trawlers and factory ship fleets in the Bering Sea will total approximately 1.4 million metric tons with pollock again being the primary species taken.

Crab Fishery

In 1975, as in past years, Japan again employed two factory ship fleets in the eastern Bering Sea crab fishery: The two factory ships were accompanied by a total of 12 pot fishing vessels, 18 less than were utilized in 1974. This was the first season under the reduced quotas established by the U.S.-Japan fisheries Agreement for 1975 and 1976. The quota for the "southern" area was 2.5 million tanner crabs and the mothership fleets share of the "northern" area quota was 8 million tanner crabs. The expedition arrived in the southern area and commenced fishing operations on March 11 and one fleet shifted operations to the northern area on April 14 and was closely followed by the second fleet on April 18 having taken the quota in the southern area. Both fleets harvested the allowable quota in the northern area by June 15 and returned to Japan. The remaining portion of the northern area quota or 3 million tanner crabs was allocated to independent crab vessels operating west of 175°W longitude. Thirty-two vessels were licensed by the Japanese Fishery Agency to engage in the fishery, however, only five vessels were observed operating between 175°W and the International Dateline and their total catches are unknown.

Salmon Fishery

The annual Japanese high seas salmon fishery by factory ships fleets again involved 10 fleets totaling 332 gillnetters. The fishery started on May 21 and the fleets had achieved their quota of 34,108 metric tons by July 25. During the last half of May, six of the fleets operated in the Alaskan area south of the western Aleutians. During June all ten fleets were in the Alaskan area and the fleets started shifting north of the Aleutian Islands chain during mid-month. At the end of June four fleets were operating in the Bering Sea and the remaining six south of the Aleutians. During the first half of July, eight fleets remained in the Alaskan area, six of which fished the Bering Sea and two fleets south of the chain. For the remaining part of the season only six fleets operated in the Alaskan area of which one remained south of the Aleutian chain.

Crop Fishery

In 1973, as in past years, Japan again employed two factory ship fleets in the eastern Bering Sea crop fishery. The two factory ships were accompanied by a total of 12 non-fishing vessels, 18 less than were utilized in 1974. This was the first season under the reduced quotas established by the U.S.-Japan Fisheries Agreement for 1975 and 1976. The quota for the "southern" area was 2.5 million Tanner crabs and the northern fleet share of the "northern" area quota was 3 million Tanner crabs. The expedition arrived in the southern area and commenced fishing operations on March 11 and one-fleet shifted operations to the northern area on April 14 and was closely followed by the second fleet on April 18 having taken the quota in the southern area. Both fleets harvested the allowable quota in the northern area by June 15 and returned to Japan. The remaining portion of the northern area quota of 3 million Tanner crabs was allocated to independent crab vessels operating west of 150° longitude. Thirty-two vessels were licensed by the Japanese Fishery Agency to engage in the fishery, however, only five vessels were observed operating between 150°W and the International Date Line and their total catches are unknown.

Salmon Fishery

The annual Japanese high seas salmon fishery by factory ship fleets again involved 10 fleets totaling 332 gillnetters. The fishery started on May 21 and the fleets had achieved their quota of 34,100 metric tons by July 28. During the last half of May, six of the fleets operated in the Alaskan area south of the western Aleutians. During June all ten fleets were in the Alaskan area and the fleets started shifting north of the Aleutian Islands chain during mid-month. At the end of June four fleets were operating in the Bering Sea and the remaining six south of the Aleutians. During the first half of July, eight fleets remained in the Alaskan area, six of which fished the Bering Sea and two fleets south of the chain. For the remaining part of the season only six fleets operated in the Alaskan area of which one remained south of the Aleutian chain.

Sablefish Fishery

The Japanese longline fishery for sablefish off Alaska in 1975 was again primarily in the Gulf of Alaska, however, a substantial increase in effort was conducted in 1975 along the Aleutian Islands chain. As in past years only sporadic effort was conducted in the Bering Sea. Longline fishing in the Gulf of Alaska was continuous throughout 1975. The average number of vessels present per month varied from 7 to 8 throughout the year except for a high of 12 in the month of September. The vessels fished along the Continental Shelf edge from off the southeastern coast to south of Sanak Island and the western Gulf of Alaska.

Longlining for sablefish along the Aleutian Islands was conducted at an increased level in 1975 over 1974. With the exception of January, vessels fished along the Continental Shelf edge throughout the period. Fishing effort was primarily in the central and eastern Aleutians area with limited effort off the western Aleutians. An average of two vessels fished during February, March, May, August, one vessel during June and July, three vessels during September and a high of four vessels in April.

A minor longline fishery for sablefish was conducted along the Continental Shelf edge in the Bering Sea during 1975. One vessel fished west and northwest of the Pribilof Islands during January and August, and two vessels fished southeast of the Pribilof Islands during February, August, and October.

It is estimated that the Japanese longline catch will total approximately 23,000 metric tons in 1975 composed mainly of sablefish with secondary species of rockfish and flounders.

Herring Fishery

Japanese herring fishery off Alaska during 1975 was limited to a gillnet fishery during the spring months along the western coast of Alaska. The normal winter trawl fishery in the central Bering Sea was not conducted during the winter of 1974-1975. The spring gillnet fishery was initiated in mid-May by six gillnet vessels in the Togiak area on the northwestern approaches to Bristol Bay. Severe ice conditions in the Bering Sea prevented the vessels from fishing northward beyond Nunivak Island and the fishery was abandoned during the first week of June. It is estimated that the 1975 gillnet expedition caught 500 to 1,000 metric tons of herring.

Snail Fishery

The Japanese did not conduct a snail fishery in the central Bering Sea during 1975.

Whale Fishery

The Japanese in 1975 reported three whaling fleets in the North Pacific Whaling expedition. As in past years the fleets remained well offshore generally out of the Alaskan area.