

United Fishermen of the Kuskokwim and Lower Yukon Fishermen's Association Report to the
North Pacific Fisheries Management Council's Management Program on Bering Sea
Herring Program

The villages of the Lower Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers systems object to the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) allowed for Bering Sea Herring, particularly that portion of the herring catch intercepted by the Japanese gill net spring fishery that operates between Bristol Bay and Norton Sound.

We do not believe that the Bering Sea herring stocks can support a harvest of 21,000 metric tons of herring. Our villages are not familiar with massive fishing efforts, and the Council is not familiar with the subsistence lifestyle, and the small potential for the development of a commercial fishery within our region for spawning herring. I will attempt to educate the council to the value of herring to our subsistence coastal villages.

In our region, the villages on the coastline from Kwigillingok to Scammon Bay depend on the herring for a major part of their food supply. Our old people have informed us that the herring that "rush" near our coastal villages are less than before. The old people say that in the late 40's and early 50's, they use to have six to eight herring rushes. Now, they only have two rushes. Our people say one thing, the one thing that is obvious to them, the Japanese gill net fishery that operates within sight of Nelson Island. Our people have followed the catch statistics of the eastern Bering Sea herring fleets of the Soviets and the Japanese. The obvious decline in Eastern Bering Sea herring is reflected in our own diminishing harvests. There are three major runs of herring that spawn in western Alaska. In the spring, major runs go to Bristol Bay and Norton Sound; a smaller run approaches the coastline between the Kuskokwim and Yukon. These are the fish our villages harvest for subsistence. We do not agree that the Japanese and the Soviets should have unrestricted use of American spawn herring, nor that our coastline should be spared the Japanese interception allowing Norton Sound and Bristol Bay to take the brunt of the Japanese sac roe industry. We know that the Japanese are not intercepting these herring for food or protein; they are intercepting these herring for the maturing sac roe. We have been told by Japanese processors seeking commercial herring industry in our coastal villages that the fish are thrown away, rotted in barrels to harden and flatten the maturing sac roe, to allow for easy processing of the sac roe. At this time, with the herring being the only major fish in quantity to spawn near our coastal villages, the villages have rejected all commercial offers to date. Our villages realize that their resource is dwindling and they do not want to participate in the decline. The subsistence value of these herring has not been calculated, but the replacement value of protein has been calculated by the U.S. public Health service delivered to a coastal village at 18¢/replacement gram of protein. If the herring continue to decline, and the people are forced off the herring, we can look forward to social disruption, and economic chaos in our coastal villages. They will have nothing to eat, there is no work, and enforced migration or welfare is their only recourse.

The fishermen of our region have asked us to petition the council to eliminate the 1,000 metric ton quote allowed to the Japanese spring gill net herring fishery off our coastline. We want it eliminated. Each year, our fishermen see the Japanese ships fishing off of Nelson Island, right off our coast, within the 12 miles. Communications are poor in our coastal communities, and when word finally reaches officials of the State and the Coast Guard that the Japanese are in our waters, fishing our herring, the familiar reply by the Coast Guard is "Are you sure"? I am quote Paul John of Toksok Bay and John Angiak of Tununak who made special efforts in 1974 to have the Coast Guard stop the Japanese fishing within sight of Nelson Island. Both men told us that they flew to Bethel because their short wave call for federal protection were not answered. They brought with them pieces of nets washed ashore by a storm as proof of the Japanese fishery, but when the Coast Guard finally believed them, and responded, the Japanese fishing fleet had move on past Nelson Island. A Coast Guard official was requested to come to Nelson Island and meet with the villages and discuss the situation, but no one came. The Federal Government until this time has not cared about our subsistence fishing on the coastline for herring. We appear to be an inconvenience to the American Government as it attempts to negotiate with the Japanese on bottom fish. I will say it again, our coastal villages want the Japanese gill net herring fish terminated, and the 1,000 metric tons allowed to this fishery to be deducted from the allowable catch in the Bering Sea.

A second item of interest is the investment possibilities of our villages entering into the herring industry in Norton Sound and Bristol Bay where the runs are heavier, and can support commercial fishing. We have talked with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game about run strength and fisheries potential, and we have determined that our villages would only enter this fishery once the foreign fleets are stopped from intercepting American spawned herring. Our funds are available, and our fishermen are willing to enter the commercial market, but only after the Japanese and Soviets are pulled off our herring stocks. We are petitioning the Council in this part to reduce the total allowable catch of Eastern Bering Sea Herring for the foreign fishing fleets to allow for the development of domestic American fishery. I have copies of the cumulative harvest for both subsistence and commercial herring by American fisheries to support our plea for the elimination of the gill net fishery, and a reduction in the total catch by foreign nations to allow an American fishery to develop.

