

Inc. #17

December 3, 1976

ADDITIONAL JAPANESE COMMENTS ON THE TANNER CRAB ISSUE

Japanese comments on the Draft Preliminary Fishing Management Plan for the Tanner Crab Fishery of the eastern Bering Sea were previously made available for review by the North Pacific Council members.

However, in view of current discussions, we would like to emphasize the following points:

1. Findings of both the Biology & Research Committee of the INPFC and the Council's Scientific & Statistical Committee confirm that Tanner crab stocks of the C. Baerdi and C. Opilio of the eastern Bering Sea are in very good condition. We believe these findings have been based upon the best scientific data available and support the continuation of the Japanese fishery as provided for in the Preliminary Management Plan.
2. Since 1969, the Japanese fishing industry has expended a great deal of effort in the development of fishing grounds and home markets in order to make the fishing for Tanner crab economically viable. At the same time, a previously unutilized resource regarded as trash was developed into a valuable food product. Should such past effort and performance be neglected, resulting in the displacement of Japanese fishermen from current southern fishing grounds, not only will we lose a valuable source of food,

but we will also be forced to discontinue fleet operations, resulting in loss of income and serious unemployment affecting thousands of people. From an economical standpoint, it would be impossible to shift our fishing effort to northern waters where C. Baerdi is not found and C. Opilio is much smaller in size. Such would not be justified, even under the concept of optimum sustainable yield, whatever the definition may be, especially in view of the resource condition as mentioned above. (The total catch of C. Baerdi by Japan this year was about 4500 m.t. which is less than 10% of the total allowable catch for C. Baerdi suggested by the Scientific & Statistical Committee.)

3. Crab is a luxury food item for the Japanese people. Therefore, demand for Tanner crab fluctuates with the general economic situation. In the long run, there is certainly a good possibility for an expanded crab market. However, we would like to stress that only through the marketing efforts of Japanese fishing companies selling the product which they themselves catch will the general expansion of the market for both domestic and imported Tanner crab be feasible. For example, in the case of King crab, after Japan had been phased out of the fishery by the United States and the Soviet Union, the Japanese domestic market for King crab shrank. Contrary to expectations, imports decreased rather than increased. Therefore, the continuation of the Japanese Tanner crab fishery is necessary for the maintenance and expansion of the Japanese domestic market.

4. Finally, commercial business transactions are exceedingly complex and vary depending upon the general economic situation, consumer preference, cost of the product and other market variables. As in the case of King crab, the exclusion of Japanese Tanner crab fisheries will not necessarily lead to an increase in Japanese imports. Rather, only through cooperative efforts between Japanese and U.S. fishing industries and within the limits of commercial reasonableness will the market for Tanner crab be expanded in Japan and elsewhere.