

REDUCTION OF FOREIGN HERRING ALLOCATION IN THE BERING SEA

Chairman Rasmuson requested, after the last Council meeting, the staff to investigate the possibility of reducing the foreign herring allocation in the eastern Bering Sea by whatever amount is taken by American fishermen in the spring fishery along the coast.

The total allowable catch (TAC) for herring in the eastern Bering Sea is calculated at 21,000 metric tons. Of this amount it was expected that approximately 1,000 metric tons would be taken in the subsistence fishery by the villages along the coast from Togiak Bay to Norton Sound. Of the remaining 20,000 tons, 19,400 were assigned to foreign nations and 600 tons were left unassigned.

Of the 19,400 tons allocated 5,800 tons went to Japan and 13,600 tons to the Soviet Union.

Presumably all of the foreign allocation will be taken in the winter trawl fishery which takes place northwest of the Pribilofs from November through February. There is a possibility that Japanese gillnetters will take some fish in the May, June fishery, even though they will have to stay out of the area north of 58° north latitude and east of 168° west longitude. Some ships are probably already engaged in this fishery, but the potential catch in those areas is unknown since the gillnetters have not fished that far from the coast in the past. The foreign herring fishery, because it occurs in the middle of the winter, does lend itself to a change in allocation during the calendar year. Allocation changes made in July or August would not affect an on-going fishery. Neither Japan nor the Soviet Union normally start a trawl fishery for herring until November, when the fish return to their wintering grounds northwest of the Pribilofs.

The best information available on the catch to date by Japanese and Soviet fishermen for 1977 is 9,500 metric tons, 1,277 metric tons by Japan, 8,257 metric tons by the Soviet Union.

There are at least two groups of U.S. fishermen currently pursuing herring along the Bering Sea coast from Togiak to Norton Sound. Their catch will not be known until the end of June, but it is possible that it could run to 3,000 tons or more. Assuming that the foreign fishery continues, in November and December, to take the rest of their current allocation, the U.S. catch, (outside the 1,000 tons allocated for subsistence use) would presumably be over and above the estimated TAC for this resource.

The Council may wish to request the State Department to reduce the allocation to Japan and the Soviet Union on herring prior to resumption of that fishery in November, 1977 by whatever amount is taken by the American commercial fishery this spring.

