

Subcommittee on Fisheries and Wildlife Conservation  
and the Environment of the House Committee on  
Merchant Marine and Fisheries

Field Hearing on the Fisheries Conservation  
and Management Act of 1976  
Astoria, Oregon  
April 21, 1978

Mr. Chairman:

First I want to take this opportunity to thank you and Mr. Everett of the subcommittee staff for coming to Astoria to conduct this oversight hearing on the landmark 200-mile law. This is an extremely important new law to this community and to Oregon because fishing is one of our state's oldest and most important industries.

Mr. Chairman, when the 200 mile law was enacted two years ago there was great celebration here in Astoria and in ports up and down the coast. For years our fishermen watched as foreign factory ships swept up fish stocks literally within view of our own coasts.

But then in 1976 Congress completed a 20 year effort and pushed through a law intended to keep the foreigners out and assure that our fisheries resources would be managed in a way to "assure that our citizens would benefit from the employment, food supply, and revenues which could be generated thereby".

It was a great victory. With it came the promise -- even the expectation -- that the law would revitalize the U.S. fishing fleet and be an economic boon to coastal communities.

In some respects it can be said that the law is moving us in this direction.

The Department of Commerce reports, for example, that the monthly average of foreign fishing vessels spotted off our shores was one third less in 1977 than in 1976. On the Pacific Coast U.S. catch of

fish under regulation has increased. The catch of Jack Mackerel is up to 45,000 tons from 17,000 tons in 1976. The Tanner crab catch is up to 45,000 tons from 37,000 in 1976. Support industries too appear to be benefiting as new boat orders soar, and new interest is seen in investments in fishing gear, processing plants and equipment.

Yet, in many other ways the law has not accomplished what we had hoped. In fact, it has had some unexpected results which have caused uncertainty and confusion among some factions of the fishing industry.

The purpose of the hearing today is to explore these problem areas to see if we can identify ways to strengthen or modify the law so that it will work as we intended it to.

Mr. Chairman, there are many aspects of the law which this committee will review in the course of the next few weeks. Today I would like to focus on those which are especially important to the Northwest.

Clearly, the most difficult is that which surrounds the allocation of salmon. Salmon has long been the most prized and sought after fish in our area. In recent years the competition has become intense as federal dam and reclamation projects have accelerated the decline of once thriving stocks on the Columbia and Snake Rivers. On top of this were decisions by Judge Belloni which allocated up to 50 per cent of the Columbia River fish to Indian treaty tribes. The combination of factors signalled new rules for non-treat fishermen in the Northwest even before the advent of the 200-mile law.

Enactment of the Fisheries Conservation and Management Act injected a new factor into that already complicated equation. It did

this by creating regional management councils with authority to allocate fish among user groups. The thought: it's better to have these decisions made at the local level than by Washington bureaucrats. In the Northwest, the Pacific Fisheries Management Council has worked hard to balance the competing claims to this resource. I have not always agreed with the Council's decisions. I hope today we might explore ways in which these decisions might be made so that there might be a better understanding of them among the various user groups -- and a better understanding by the Council of the human affects of its decisions among these user groups.

Mr. Chairman, the situation facing our salmon fishermen is not the only difficult question before us. On the West Coast we are seeing the beginning of new and unanticipated arrangements whereby U.S. fishermen have been asked to deliver fish to foreign processing vessels. Are such arrangements within the intent of the 200-mile law? Will they stifle the development of the U.S. processing industry? How can they be controlled in order to foster the growth of our processing industry while still allowing U.S. fishermen an opportunity to capitalize on a resource that largely has been given over to foreign fleets in the past? I hope that we can talk about this today.

I also hope that we can talk about the enforcement of the FCMA. Coast Guard boardings of domestic vessels have been the subject of intense resentment among parts of my fishing constituency. I believe that the Coast Guard has attempted to work with the industry in an effort to develop a procedure that would make these boardings less objectionable. I would like an update on this effort. I also am interested in the progress made by the management agencies in developing accurate stock statistics inasmuch as these form the data base upon which

the fisheries management plans are decided. Finally, I believe it's time to talk in some detail about the plans for addressing the environmental problems which have caused the decline in fish stocks in the rivers and coastal estuaries. I understand that the Council expects to have a comprehensive proposal which addresses these problems in 1979 and I am eager to see that plan completed on schedule.

Mr Chairman, I believe our common goal -- and the goal of everyone in attendance here today -- is to help make this law work to the benefit of the industry for whom it was enacted.

It already is. But it needs to do it better. This official field hearing in Astoria fulfills a promise I made at a town meeting last year and I think it will shed light on some of the answers.