

Guam Gets Involved In Regional Fisheries

A few days ago initial meetings were held by the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council in Honolulu, a session that could eventually have more impact upon Guam than anything since that day in July when Marines charged ashore at Asan.

The council, one of eight similar bodies throughout the nation, was established by the Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976, which also provides for a 200-mile fishery conservation zone around the United States to become effective next March 1.

The Western Pacific Council is comprised of representatives of the public sectors and local governments of Hawaii, Guam and American Samoa, as well as the Departments of Commerce, Interior and State and the Coast Guard. It apparently doesn't include Micronesia, which has its own rules and regulations. It apparently doesn't include the Northern Marianas, either.

The state department and the interior department, which sit in on the council meetings, are probably guiding the Council over the delicate matters of island rights.

Members of the council were given information about the activities of Japanese fishermen in the area and what the impact will be when the 200-mile United States fishing zone goes into effect March 1. The council is vitally concerned about how much Japanese (as well as Korean and Chinese) fishing goes on within the 200-mile zone.

Figures released by the Japanese aren't impressive. The official Japanese source

said that of 19,957 metric tons of fish caught by Japanese trawlers (mostly in the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska), only about 10 percent came from within the 200-mile zone.

The Japanese also had 16 longline vessels in the 250 to 500 gross-ton range

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which caught 4,000 metric tons of fish. Of this only 500 tons, or about 13 percent, was from the 200-mile zone.

Line fishing, with only eight ships, accounted for another 500 to 600 metric tons in the areas of Guam and the Northern Marianas. These are small vessels that drop down baskets with about 30 hooks on each drop line. Council members expressed some skepticism over the figures.

The larger picture of Japanese fishing was given recently by the New York Times. According to them, Japanese fishermen last year harvested 10.8 million metric tons of sea creatures from the world's waters. Of this amount almost half, or more than 4.5 million metric tons, was taken within 200 miles of other nations' shores. The Times stated that Japanese fishermen take 1.6 million tons of fish from United States waters. Much of this, of course, is off of Alaska, which wouldn't affect us directly.

By agreement, Japanese fishermen are allowed to continue to fish for tuna within the 200-mile zone. But most of this tuna

caught from longline ships does not come from within the zone.

The council was told that the Japanese have 90 ships in the 90 to 130 gross-ton range which search for precious coral. This is mostly in the area around Midway, Wake, Yap and Saipan. In 1975 these ships took 100 metric tons of coral.

In addition to the Japanese, the Taiwanese and South Korean fishermen also move throughout the Pacific. The council was told that the Republic of China had 648 longline vessels, but that 137 have given up longline fishing and have gone into other kinds of fishing. Thirty-two of these ships are now going after coral.

At about the same time, the South Pacific Commission, which encompasses Guam, the Northern Marianas and Micronesia, claimed that total catches of skipjack tuna in the SPC region now exceed 200,000 tons a year, with a value approaching \$100 million a year. Micronesians have long claimed that fish catches off their islands by the Japanese, Chinese and Koreans also approach \$100 million yearly.

The council's primary responsibility is to develop and recommend to the secretary of commerce conservation and management measures for all fishery resources and fisheries, both domestic and foreign, within the 200-mile zones of Hawaii, Guam and Samoa. The council also will be responsible for reviewing any applications which foreign governments may make to exploit fishery resources within the fishery conservation zone.

The Japanese and the Koreans also were hard hit by a recent announcement that the Soviet Union also had decided to im-

pose a 200-mile economic zone around the Soviet Union's coast. This would cut a huge chunk out of Japan's traditional fishing grounds. The Japanese get 51 percent of their protein from fish, and now will have to negotiate with the Soviets.

One way that the Japanese are seeking to circumvent any major disruption is by investing in American fishing-related companies in an effort to get around the restrictions posed by the 200-mile limit. Some 33 Japanese firms are involved with such American firms.

South Korea also is deeply concerned, both with the U.S. decision and now the Russian move. It is the world's seventh-largest fish-catching country, with its total catch amounting to 600,000 tons a year.

The Coast Guard, the council was told, was given the task of policing the Pacific waters after March 1. It has already spotted fishing activity some 200 miles northwest of Midway Island.

Guam's participation in the council does, finally, give the island a voice in what could become a dramatic confrontation between the fishing nations of the world and the nations—like the U.S.—that control much of the oceans.

It is vital that Guam keep informed as to what is taking place. We're also concerned about the Northern Marianas and the Micronesians, and their role in overall policy making.

More importantly, we're concerned about the long-range effects that this world political change could have on the nations of Eastern Asia. Wars have been started over less-important disruptions in the economies and lifestyles of the people. We don't want that to happen. JCM.