

## OPENING SESSION

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*Chairman — C. P. IDYLL, Chairman, Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute, Miami Florida.*

### Opening Address

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Washington, D. C.*

THE TOPIC ASSIGNED ME is how the fishing industry of the United States can get down to the business of financing and constructing the many vessels of all types that will be necessary if we are to maintain a fishing industry worthy of America's great fisheries traditions. And I'm telling you, this is a real assignment.

In a way, I'm handing the problem right back to the industry and to the Department of Interior. By that I mean there will have to be a mammoth job done to educate Congress and the non-fishing areas of the country to the importance of the fisheries industry to our economy. It is most significant, I think, that in the voluminous compilation of speeches made by the Presidential candidates in the 1960 campaign, only one mention was made of the fisheries industry and its problems.

We have a national maritime policy, mostly set forth in the Merchant Marine Act of 1936. Among other things, that policy requires domestic vessels to be built in shipyards of the United States, and fishing vessels are classed as in the domestic trade. This is rather incongruous, because our fishing craft are meeting almost overwhelming foreign competition. Nevertheless, under existing statutes, new fishing vessels must be constructed in shipyards of this country, where costs are twice as high as in any of the competing nations.

The only possible way for fishing vessel owners to be on a par as to initial costs with foreign competition is through government aid in building their vessels. United States commercial vessels serving our foreign trade are aided in that way. However, that is subsidy—a nasty word today. Many senators are against subsidies of any kind, particularly new subsidies. Much as Senator Magnuson and some others of our Senate Commerce Committee are anxious to help, the fishing industry and the interested government officials have a real job to do before substantial government aid to the industry, such as many other governments give, becomes established policy.

You know how important fisheries are to the national economy. You are fully aware, too, how the industry has slipped in recent years, while the fisheries of other countries have expanded tremendously. While as a nation we are eating more fishery products, more and more of them are coming from abroad.

Per-capita consumption of fishery products in this country rose during 1961 to 10.9 pounds, from a 10.1 pound rate in 1957. Meanwhile, the products represented by our domestic catch dwindled in 1961 to a record low 55.7% of the

total supply. In 1948 we were producing domestically 80% of the country's total supply, but year by year the percentage has dropped. Our present position shows little prospect for improvement.

I was privileged a few weeks ago to hear a first-hand report about Russia's merchant marine, from a Lykes Brothers official whom I am sure some of you know, Frank Nemeec. He had just returned from an extensive tour of Russia, where the situation in the commercial shipping field forecasts for the future what has happened already in fisheries. The vast Russian fishing fleets that have virtually taken over what once were this country's choicest fishing grounds, he told us, will be dwarfed within the next decade by a vastly expanded Soviet merchant shipping fleet.

As is the case in the fisheries field, this huge Russian merchant fleet will be completely subsidized by government. Just to give an indication of the difficulties we may expect when more substantial aid for our United States fisheries is sought, let me cite that our responsible Maritime Administration officials on the one hand are constantly warning of the threat this Russian merchant fleet expansion offers, while at the same time they are solemnly protesting that shipping subsidies must be reduced, and ultimately eliminated.

The sum total of maritime subsidies since the Merchant Marine Act of 1936 was enacted represents little more than one year's agricultural subsidies' cost, yet maritime subsidies are always under attack. This despite the fact that a high percentage of these subsidies are subject to recapture by the government. In one ten-year period following World War II Lykes Brothers paid back its operating subsidies 100%, and other lines have returned varying percentages.

What has this to do with construction of fishing vessels, you say? It is pertinent to this extent. The agricultural industry has used its various organizations to — shall I say — “educate” Congress on the need for agricultural subsidy acts. There is much anti-subsidy sentiment in Congress, plus rigid Administration insistence upon budget restrictions. Those interested in the improvement of the fishing industry will have to persuade Congress that realistic construction subsidies for fishing vessels will pay dividends to the economy.

United States fisheries have a real story to tell, a story that deserves to be put before the Congress and the people of the country. The cause of our fisheries must not be lost because of our failure to impress the country, and the Congress, of their value, and their needs.

I have prepared some figures which emphasize the age of United States fishing vessels now in service, and this I will go into briefly. While complete information is not available, a high percentage of the fishing craft in operation in 1961, as indicated by a random sampling, were from 13 to 22 years old. Relatively few of them were less than eight years old, some even go back to the last century.

Against this we have seen enough of the Russian fleets in the Atlantic and the Pacific to know that the Soviets have in recent years pursued an explosive fleet expansion program. The first Soviet stern-trawler was operating in 1956. Today it is estimated that they have at least 100 of these 3,000-gross-ton vessels, plus factory ships of up to 15,000 to 20,000 gross tons each, with crews of 200 to 300 technicians.

The factory ships handle the catches right on the spot. They produce canned, salted and frozen fish and shellfish, fishmeal and oil, and whale products. And when we talk of Russian catches, the word “mammoth” continually comes to mind. Their big trawlers can take in one haul more than many United States

vessels can catch in days. And they don't have to lose precious time, and sacrifice cargo quality, by returning to their home ports to land and process their catches.

While undoubtedly you know all this, it is well to keep in mind that in February, 1962, 14 small Soviet factory ships and two trawlers were operating on Georges Bank, in the North Atlantic. In the same month the Soviet herring fleet, including a fish-locating vessel and two large freezer-stern trawlers, was reported to be operating in the Pribilof Islands area, where some 100 medium trawlers were said to be hauling catches to refrigerated fish transports. In the same month 40 Russian trawlers were reported fishing for flounder north of Unimak Island. And I am sure you all read with interest the recent account of troubles with Russian fishing vessels in Alaskan waters.

Against this, a recent statement in the Senate by Senator Magnuson emphasized that:

"The United States has no mother ships, no factory ships, no stern-ramp trawlers, no refrigerated transport ships, no large fisheries vessels of any kind. No modern U. S. fishing fleet exists, nor what other nations would consider a modern fishing vessel."

As you know, the joint Congressional-Interior Committee on Fishing Vessel Construction developed several proposals for introduction in the 87th Congress. These bills would have authorized construction of two types of stern-ramp trawlers, and would have provided for easing the requirements and raising the percentage of subsidy for fishing vessel construction. It was too late in the session to get action on them before adjournment, but they undoubtedly will be re-introduced in the next Congress, and you can help to see that they are enacted into law.

United States fisheries problems are too many and too big to be handled otherwise than by the combined efforts and intelligence of the entire industry working in conjunction with the Interior Department.

Positive, realistic objectives must be developed, on which to base a long-term program, while certain basic requirements are incorporated in legislation for presentation to the 88th Congress. The budget situation being what it is, with space and defense appropriations in astronomical figures, it will have to be appreciated that cures for all fisheries problems cannot be achieved, and should not be attempted, overnight.

Justification for the program must be set forth realistically, stressing the industry's importance to the nation's economy and to the solution of the food problems of the future. Not to be overlooked is the invaluable service to defense that fishing vessel owners have rendered in two world wars, and the increased reliance that will necessarily devolve upon the industry's fleets in any future emergency. With only a minimum of coastal or inter-coastal vessels to be taken over by government in a future crisis, every vessel in our fisheries industry will have strategic importance.

Here it is well to point out how strongly government did rely upon our fishing vessels in World Wars I and II. An exact breakdown of World War I use of fishing vessels is not available, but the report of the Secretary of the Navy in 1918 noted that "many hundred" vessels of commercial type, including all classes, had been added to the operating naval forces. And we who were around in that war know how vital a part the country's trained fishermen and their boats played in coast defense, particularly.

During World War II, some 738 fishing craft were requisitioned, for varying periods of time, for the use of the armed forces. Such requisitions included about 25% of the productive capacity of the fleet.

In some branches of the fisheries as many as half the vessels were requisitioned for coastal patrol, and for transporting munitions and food to defense outposts and theaters of combat.

By September, 1943 some 845 fishing vessels on the Eastern Sea Frontier were equipped with two-way radios, the frequencies of which were sealed to the Radio Marine Company and the Coast Guard. In other areas, vessels were used as harbor craft and patrol and transport vessels. The West Coast tuna vessels were especially adaptable as supply transports to advanced bases in the South Pacific Islands.

Keep this point in mind. A most persuasive argument for enactment of the 33-1/3% subsidy statute was the potential use of these fishing vessels in a future crisis. That same argument could be equally persuasive with respect to new proposals for aid to the industry.

It would seem highly pertinent to suggest that government, however cooperative, cannot solve all your problems. Scientists around the world are doing their part to help, with new techniques for fish detection, capture, and processing. Apparently your competition is finding some of these techniques most helpful. Beyond anything government may contribute, our fisheries must keep abreast of these scientific helps, and put them to use wherever feasible.

While radar, Loran, and the Decca system have reduced the hazards of navigation, the application of sonar, the echo sounder and echo ranging have been found extremely useful in searching out and identifying certain concentrations of fish. The use of these aids in conjunction with scouting planes reportedly has proven most helpful in the location of herring shoals by the Icelandic fleet, while helicopters are reported to be in common use by Soviet fisheries in the Caspian Sea, the Black Sea, and in the Baltic and Barents area. The large "motherships" used by the Russians also are provided with helicopters.

Devices to attract the fish are receiving increased attention. The Russians are said to have been using underwater lights since 1951 in the Caspian Sea, in conjunction with a pump. The fish are located by a sonic depth finder, then a suction hose with electric lights attached at the funnel is lowered to the proper depth, and the fish attracted by the light are sucked in and pumped to the fish hold.

Improved methods for processing and freezing the fish are being developed also, with special attention to freezing fish taken in tropical waters. All of these developments will have their effect on the future of world fisheries. How well we keep up with them, and make use of them, will have its part in determining the success or lack of success of our United States fishing fleets.

We are in trouble, fisheries-wise, and if we stick to our old, outmoded ways, we'll be in progressively worse trouble. But I don't think that is going to happen. We have hit bottom, with a thud, compared to our competing fishing nations. We won't stay that way. We know what our problems are — and that, I am confident, is the first step in our progress towards better days.