

The Development of Japanese Fisheries with Government Aids¹

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BY ANY RANKING Japan is one of the foremost fishing nations of the world today. Five unique conditions in Japan have stimulated fish production and consumption. They are: (1) a long and broken coast, bathed by both warm and cold currents; (2) the restricted development of animal husbandry by formidable mountain terrain; (3) the influence of Buddhist religion which fostered a seafood diet because it prohibited eating red meat; (4) the narrowness of the country which permitted easy access to seafood by people living in the interior and (5) a higher degree of industrial development especially among fishery related industries, such as textiles and ship-building, than generally prevailed in the Far East during the early 1900's.

In addition to these five factors, Japanese fisheries have been continually stimulated by favorable government policies. Government support exists in four major policy areas. Three were adopted at the turn of the century and the fourth during the depression of the 1930's. The first of these, established in 1897, set forth the policy of encouraging deep-sea fishing by providing financial incentives to owners based on the tonnage of fishing boats. The results at that time were unsuccessful because of the superior technology of competing nations.

The second significant policy was the passage of a law in 1901 controlling fishing activities by issuing fishing rights and permits for inshore fishing grounds. This step did away with the common property rights of inshore fisheries, and removed a sociological block to the management of these natural resources. In this same year Japan constitutionally sanctioned the first fishermen's cooperative union. These unions set the rules which determined who fished and how each fishing territory was to be exploited. Eventually these cooperatives entered into the marketing of fish and the sale of fishing supplies and equipment. They became co-signers and administrators of fishermen's loans and more recently have underwritten most insurance, health and retirement programs.

Another step taken in 1901 was the governmental program of holding fisheries exhibits where cash incentives were awarded for improved fishing techniques. In time this program evolved into fisheries extension services and the establishment of prefectural training schools and experimental laboratories.

Subsidies for the motorization of fishing vessels commenced about 1905. This was the third crucial policy area. Although initially a subsidized activity, this soon became a loan program for vessel construction with a special bank handling loans at low interest rates.

Following the motorization of the fishing fleet in the early 1900's, deep-sea

¹Translated from the Japanese by Yosuke Hirono, Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences, University of Miami.

fishing was encouraged with further financial incentives, naval protection for the infant industry, and the formation of large fishing companies. As a result the deep-sea industry developed the mother-ship system of fishing and foreign land-based factories, which permitted Japan to fish in any ocean.

The fourth major area of policy of assistance to the fisheries resulted from conflict between shoreline and deep-sea fishermen, which became especially severe during the depression of the 1930's. Fishermen who were unable to make a living from the sea, as a result of depletion of the inshore fish stocks from trawling, were employed by the Japanese government in a construction program for docks and harbors. This program became doubly important after World War II, and was of still further importance in the post-war vessel construction boom. These conditions resulted in the enactment of the 1950 Fishing Port law, which enabled the government to make long range plans for port maintenance, renovation and new construction. In 1970 a new phase will be commenced.

Well over 60% of the funds budgeted by the government have been spent for port construction in the years 1966-1969. Matching funds are provided by prefectural and village or city governments, the central government paying 66% of the total cost. At times cooperatives provided some of these matching funds, which they obtain as long term low interest loans from the Agricultural Fisheries National Bank.

Everyone in fisheries knows of the post-war resurgence of the Japanese distant-water fishing fleets. This amazing task was accomplished by the entrance into the fishing industry of aggressive men who had accumulated capital in other post-war industries. Their dynamic drive and great desire for economic development resulted in the establishment of an extensive chain of fishing facilities. Government participation in this development consisted of technical assistance and vessel loans, but no subsidies. Upon down-payment of 70% of the total vessel cost, the loans for the remainder were payable within 5 years. The fishing industry secured 8% of the total loans from the National Recovery Bank in 1947. This policy led to the construction of 2,380,000 tons of fishing vessels by 1967, or more than the total fishing fleet tonnage before the war.

Production of the distant-water fleets leveled off after 1964, and Japan began to import seafoods in large quantities. Since the fishing industry was not able to meet the market demand, a plan for socio-economic development was introduced in 1966.

The main problem of the distant-water fleets is that profitable fishing grounds are in full use by the world's fishing countries. Other grounds are too distant or lack sufficient quantities or qualities of fish to be profitable. The problem remains unsolved and has considerably influenced present Japanese fishery policy which stresses the improvement and advancement of the near-shore fisheries.

Traditionally the Japanese government has neglected near-shore fisheries so that manpower could be used for distant-water fishing. The three main goals of present Japanese fishing policy are to provide sufficient protein to the public, to revive inshore fisheries production and to increase the earnings of the fishermen. The reasons for this shift in policy are: (1) overcrowding of the distant-water fisheries, (2) desire to raise the earnings of the near-shore fishermen and (3) research into fish culture, proving that shoreline fishing can be very profitable.

But near-shore fisheries have not been completely neglected over the years. Cooperatives had been established, credit through the national banks had been arranged and an inshore fishing zone had been set up to provide protection to the fishery resources from the deep-sea trawling fleet. Near-shore fishermen, unable to make a living because of depletion of the resources by the trawlers, were used in port and dock construction. The need for expanded government assistance was implemented with the passage in 1961 of the Shoreline Fishermen's Development Act. This law was enacted in response to the imbalance between earnings of shoreline fishermen and industrial workers. The law provided for near-shore fishing boat construction loans from the Agricultural Fisheries National Bank at low interest rates (3.5%), repayable over 20 years. Furthermore, fishermen improvement loans were provided by the central and prefectural governments.

In 1969 the central government expanded its activities with a plan for modernization and rationalization of the near-shore fisheries, budgeting \$6 million for this program. The plan included a compulsory insurance system for all fishing vessels over one ton and a guaranteed annual earning system, which guaranteed 70% of the average yearly earnings over a 3 year period. Further actions to implement this law include sending fisheries technicians to instruct fishermen in new techniques; a government created fish cultivation center which provides fish to be planted along the shore line; donations of money to aid in creating artificial inshore fishing grounds; fish culture projects and fish processing plants; and a modernization fund to equalize interest payments on loans between the Agricultural Fisheries Central and Agricultural Fisheries National Banks.

The Shore Line Fisheries Development law requires an annual progress report before the Diet and a plan for the succeeding year's work.

Despite handsome financial aid and technical assistance from the central government, the Japanese near-shore fisheries face a serious development problem in the future. Because of increasing growth of the Japanese economy, industrial interests are seeking new sites for expansion along the level lands of the coastline. Already many areas are denied to fisheries because of pollution or alteration from dredge and fill projects. Adding to the complexity of this situation is the growing loss of younger men to factories, leaving only the older generation to fish.

Pollution control is the most significant problem for government action in the future. Methods of coping with pollution problems are presently being debated, and possible future solutions include the creation of separate industrial and fishing zones or multiwater use by both industry and fishermen in areas where wastes can be sufficiently treated.