

# **The New Place of Commercial Fisheries in the United States Government**

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ON AUGUST 8, 1956 the joint efforts of the commercial fishing industry of the United States, wildlife conservation groups, the Congress, and the Executive Branch of the Government culminated in the signing of Senate Bill 3275 by President Eisenhower. His action transformed the bill into Public Law 1024 — 84th Congress, 2nd Session — or, as it is more popularly known — The Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956.

It is generally conceded that the Act represents a significant forward step in commercial fisheries legislation because, for the first time, the fishery resources are specifically recognized as making material contributions to the national economy and the well being of the Nation's citizens.

The Act then goes on to declare a fisheries policy, to outline future programs and activities, and finally, to provide means for carrying out these programs and otherwise aiding the commercial fisheries.

Properly administered, these provisions of the Act appear adequate to permit the appropriate amount of deserved Federal assistance required to help solve those problems which brought about the introduction and enactment of the legislation.

Time — and the manner in which the authority under the Act is exercised — will determine if this conclusion is correct.

The Act, as its title indicates, concerns both "fish" and "wildlife." For the purpose of this review, however, I shall refer hereafter only to those provisions of the Act as they relate to commercial fisheries.

The Act begins with a Congressional policy statement which stresses the important place of fishery resources in the national economy. It spells out as among the fundamental needs of the fishing industry first, Freedom of Enterprise, second, Protection of Opportunity, and third, Governmental Assistance.

Under the latter category it specifies that Federal aid should be consistent with that provided industry generally and includes such items as:

- (a) services to provide current information on production and trade, market promotion and development, and an extension service,
- (b) research services for economic and technological development and resource conservation, and
- (c) resource management to assure the maximum sustainable production for the fisheries.

This Congressional statement represents an important advance in clarifying the position of fishery resources in the national picture, and in defining what the fishing industry may rightfully expect from the Congress. Together with the following sections of the Act, it strengthens immeasurably the position of the Department of the Interior as the primary agency for, or a responsible participant in, all governmental fishery matters.

A very important section of the Act — Section 5 — is headed INVESTIGATIONS, INFORMATION, REPORTS. Its significance lies in the fact that it requires

the conduct of continuing investigations, the preparation and dissemination of information, and the making of periodical reports to the Public, the President, and to the Congress on certain specific matters and also on any additional matters of public interest in connection with fisheries.

The matters to be investigated and reported upon cover the entire commercial fisheries field. I will mention them as they are listed in Section 5 with brief comments as to the status of our current programs in these fields. This will indicate the substantial program changes required by the Act.

The first investigation and report is required on the production and flow to market of domestic and competitive foreign fish and fishery products.

Reasonable compliance with this directive would require considerable expansion of a number of the Service's statistical and economic projects and initiation of some new ones.

The second investigation and report is required on the availability, abundance and biological requirements of the fishery resources.

The commercial potential of our resources, the best means of reducing them to possession, and recommended optimum utilization. Measures now are being determined by exploratory fishing and biological studies on a demand or spot basis.

This directive requires that we must proceed with at least deliberate speed, toward a more complete inventory of fishery resources within domestic reach; determine the best means of catching the fish making up the resources; and study and recommend measures to preserve the resources for perpetual use at the most appropriate level.

The third investigation and report is required on the competitive economic position of fish and fishery products with each other and with competitive domestic and foreign commodities.

This directive requires studies of domestic and foreign fishery products approximately comparable to the research conducted on agricultural products.

The data required as a basis for the studies indicated now are available only in part. Expansion of domestic statistical and market news data, outlook reporting, and foreign production and marketing information would be a primary need.

Various production, price and distribution indexes must be begun or further developed if trends and competitive relationships are to be determined. Tariffs and trade agreements must undergo a more detailed analysis. Parity price series must be extended to all important fisheries. Gross, net, and per capita income studies become a necessity, as does research on profits and capital investment. Output information is required, and, possibly, "market basket" studies to determine the percentage return to all who handle fishery products. And, finally, all data relating to the position of competitive domestic agricultural products must be analyzed.

The fourth investigation and report is required on the collection and dissemination of statistics on commercial and sport fishing.

Our commercial fishery statistics have become much more comprehensive in recent years. However, the coverage, whether by area, commodity or function, is not fully adequate and the dissemination, especially with respect to timeliness, must be improved upon.

Sport fishing statistics are practically nonexistent except for sporadic surveys.

In view of the uncertain magnitude of the sport fish catch initiation of surveys in this field will be very useful.

The fifth investigation and report is required on improved production and marketing practices in regard to commercial species and the conduct of educational and extension services relative to commercial fisheries matters.

There is no fishery information or extension service as such but there is a very great need for filling the gap. The fishing industry definitely suffers from a lack of ready access to improved fishing, handling, processing, and marketing techniques. It is generally recognized that fishery research achievements in these fields are farther ahead of their adoption by the industry than is the case in agriculture or comparable businesses. Nor are statistical, market news and economic services used to their utmost.

Educational activities at the college and vocational level have received a much needed stimulus from the enactment of Public Law 1027. This Act authorizes the appropriation of \$550,000 to the Department of the Interior for grants to universities and colleges to promote the education and training of professionally trained personnel needed in commercial fishing, and \$375,000 to the Department of Health, Education and Welfare for vocational training in the fishery trades.

Appropriation of these sums during the next fiscal year will provide the means for training the personnel required to help maintain the domestic fishing industry at the important level in the national economy that the Congress has proclaimed for it. These personnel are essential, directly or indirectly, to the research, the services and the other activities required or contemplated under the Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956.

The sixth and final investigation and report is required on any other matters of public interest in connection with any phase of commercial fisheries operations.

This directive simply insures that there shall be no lack of authority to investigate or report upon any other matter affecting the commercial fisheries.

Section 7 of the Act is headed POLICIES, PROCEDURES, RECOMMENDATIONS. This section requires the Department to consider and determine the policies required to carry out, in the public interest, the laws relating to commercial fisheries. The Department also must develop measures and activities, conduct studies, take steps, and make recommendations with regard to specific fishery situations.

In general, Section 7 builds on the continuing fishery investigations discussed under Section 5, requiring that measures be recommended and steps be taken to assure desirable, or prevent undesirable, developments.

The specific duties under this section are as follows:

First, the Department must develop and recommend measures to assure maximum sustainable production of fish and fishery products and prevent fluctuations.

The recommendations required presumably would be made to States, Territories, International Fishery Commissions, and the domestic industry.

They should be based on more adequate biological studies and exploratory fishing of our resources, and on expanded gear development and vessel design. Technological development of improved practices and new products, and probably economic surveys also play a part.

Second, the Department must study the economic condition of the industry, and make recommendations to the President and the Congress for stabilizing

the fisheries if there have been fluctuations in abundance or unstable marketing or fishing conditions.

The recommendations directed to the President and the Congress should be based on more adequate statistical data, and market news reports than are now available. And additional spot and long range economic studies are desirable. The recommendations could be of a legislative character or suggest the use of other administrative powers or means to meet the situation.

Third, the Department must develop and recommend promotional and informational activities to stimulate consumption whenever there is a prospective or actual surplus.

These recommendations would be directed to other Federal agencies who might assist the domestic industry, and to trade and other organizations of the type whose members use fishery products in appreciable quantity.

These recommendations should be based on timely and reliable statistical data confirming the existence of surpluses, and on a market development program comprehensive enough to coordinate a consumption campaign on a national scale.

Finally, the Department must take steps to develop, advance, manage, conserve and protect the fishery resources.

This requirement is closely allied to the first directive which required the development and recommendation of measures to assure maximum production and prevent fluctuations. The two differ in that the former provides for recommendations only, while the latter requires that positive steps be taken toward the specific goals of resource management and protection.

Section 8 of the Act is entitled STATE DEPARTMENT—COOPERATION. This section prescribes that the Department of the Interior shall be represented at international conferences, consulted on foreign aid programs, and represented in tariff negotiations whenever fishery interests are involved.

Periodic Departmental consultations on fishery problems also are required with governmental and other organizations.

In general, Section 8 confirms the Department's position as the Federal policy-making and service agency for fish and wildlife in both the international and domestic fields, subject, of course, to overriding national interests.

The President has stated that it is, and has been, Administration policy to utilize the resources of the Department of the Interior to formulate United States policies affecting fishery matters of international concern.

The reference to periodical consultations with other agencies and organizations indicates that the Department is to take the lead in seeking cooperative solutions to fishery problems as well as to utilize the advice and services of agencies in the same or allied fields.

Section 9 is entitled REPORTS ON ACTIVITIES AND IMPORTS. In general, the section strengthens the Department's position as the Federal policy-making and service agency for fish and wildlife, by requiring an annual activity report plus recommendations for necessary legislation. In addition, the Congress looks to the Department for voluntary reports on imported fishery products as problems arise, and suggests that the Tariff Commission request a report from the Department of the Interior as a part of its investigations under certain tariff acts. Finally, it directs the industry to ask the Department to report on imported fishery products, upon industry request, when there has been downward trends in domestic production or sales or increases in imports.

The voluntary departmental reports are a new responsibility, or at least one that has not been exercised previously.

The report by request of the Tariff Commission has not been spelled out explicitly before, but the Commission has been in close touch with the Fish and Wildlife Service on fishery tariff matters and makes considerable use of Service data.

The report on the import situation by request of an affected industry segment is a new responsibility which needs a great deal of study since other agencies have similar responsibilities.

The several sections of the Act I have mentioned both confirm present departmental responsibilities and add a number of important new duties.

Other sections of the bill provide for measures to assist in carrying out these old and new activities.

For example, Section 3 provides for a strong fisheries administration in the Department by establishing a new Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife, and a Commissioner of Fish and Wildlife. For the first time in our history an Assistant Secretary will devote his full time and energy in the interests of commercial fisheries and wildlife. A new United States Fish and Wildlife Service has been established which consists of two separate agencies, each with the status of a Federal Bureau. The functions of the new United States Fish and Wildlife Service will be administered under the supervision of the Commissioner of Fish and Wildlife, subject to the supervision of the Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife. The two separate agencies, known as the "Bureau of Commercial Fisheries" and the "Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife", are headed by Directors. The Bureau of Commercial Fisheries is responsible for those matters relating primarily to commercial fisheries, whales, seals, sea-lions and related matters.

Section 6 of the Act provides for the centralization and coordination of fishery programs now in other governmental agencies by requiring a review and possible transfer of the fishery functions of these other agencies to the Department of the Interior.

Section 4 of the Act establishes a \$10,000,000 fisheries loan fund to make loans to fishing vessels and for fishing gear, and for research into the basic problems of fisheries. The availability of these funds to make loans to those in the industry who are unable to obtain loans on reasonable terms elsewhere is expected to ease a serious credit situation in several areas.

As a final aid, both to the industry and to the Department's research and service programs, the Act makes permanent the Saltonstall-Kennedy Act, which was to terminate on June 30, 1957. Extension of this Act not only permits continued research and services for the industry but also increases the sums available from \$3,000,000 to well over \$4,000,000 annually.

Thus, the Act, while requiring a great deal of expanded effort on the part of the Department also has provided the tools with which to accomplish the work.

Although we are just beginning to operate under the Act there is every reason to believe that the new organization with its greater responsibilities, its increased funds and its improved position will render improved service to the Nation's important commercial fisheries.