

REVISIONS OF INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS AFFECTING ALASKAN FISHERIES

Ronald C. Naab

Recently the United States renegotiated several fishery agreements with Japan and the USSR that affect Alaska's fisheries. The principal changes in the agreements and the benefits to U.S. fishing interests are discussed in this article.

Alaska's commercial fisheries are: (1) dependent upon species that range the high seas far beyond waters of U.S. jurisdiction; (2) vulnerable to depletion by foreign fleets fishing on the high seas; and (3) receiving increasing protection through U.S. Government negotiation of international fisheries agreements. An earlier article¹ traced the evolution of the safeguards afforded Alaskan fisheries as they were faced with increasing competition by the growing foreign fleets.

Constant changes in the Alaskan and foreign fisheries require frequent revisions of international fisheries agreements to ensure that maximum benefits are being obtained for U.S. fishery interests. In late 1968 and early 1969, U.S. negotiators and advisors met with their counterparts of Japan and the USSR to reexamine several fisheries agreements.

Japanese Agreements

Negotiations with Japan began in November 1968 and extended over 3 weeks. The discussions centered around 2 agreements and involved the questions of Japanese fishing for king and tanner crabs in the eastern Bering Sea, fishing for groundfish within the U.S. contiguous fishery zone off Alaska, and fishing for groundfish in high-seas waters off the coasts of Alaska, Washington, and Oregon. The new arrangements came into effect in late December 1968 and extended the agreements, as modified, until January 1971.

King Crab Catch Quota Halved

Provisions of the modified Japanese agreements are more favorable to U.S. fishing

interests than the earlier ones. The Japanese king crab catch in the eastern Bering Sea in 1969 and 1970 will be only about one-half the 1967 and 1968 catches because their annual quota was reduced from 163,000 cases to 85,000 cases. Such a drastic reduction was needed to conserve the declining eastern Bering Sea king crab stocks while enabling U.S. fishermen to expand in the area and increase their share of the biologically allowable harvest. In addition, the modified king crab agreement further facilitated U.S. fisheries by providing for an enlarged crab pot sanctuary north of Unimak Island, within which no tangle net fishing for king crab will be allowed (figure 1). As in the earlier version, the agreement does not prohibit the Japanese from fishing in the sanctuary with other types of gear for other species. But the Japanese Government, as a domestic, is prohibiting trawling in an extensive area in the eastern Bering Sea, including the pot sanctuary.

Annual Tanner Crab Catches Limited

In recent years, the Japanese began fishing for tanner crab largely as an incidental catch by their king crab fleets. During 1968, however, the Japanese greatly increased their fishing for tanner crab to the point where the numbers of tanner crab taken far exceeded their king crab catch. Prompted, in part, by this increased Japanese fishery, the U.S. in November 1968 published a list of Continental Shelf fishery resources considered under its sole jurisdiction. Included were tanner and king crab. The recent negotiations, therefore, were expanded to include also tanner crab. The Japanese have agreed to take measures to ensure a prudent catch of tanner crabs in the eastern Bering Sea. It was feared that uncontrolled Japanese fishing for tanner crab could quickly deplete the resource--as it was becoming increasingly needed for Alaskan fisheries.

Mr. Naab is with the Enforcement and Surveillance staff, BCF, Juneau, Alaska.

This article was directed toward fishermen and processors.

¹/CFR, October 1968, pp. 46-56. Also Sep. No. 825.

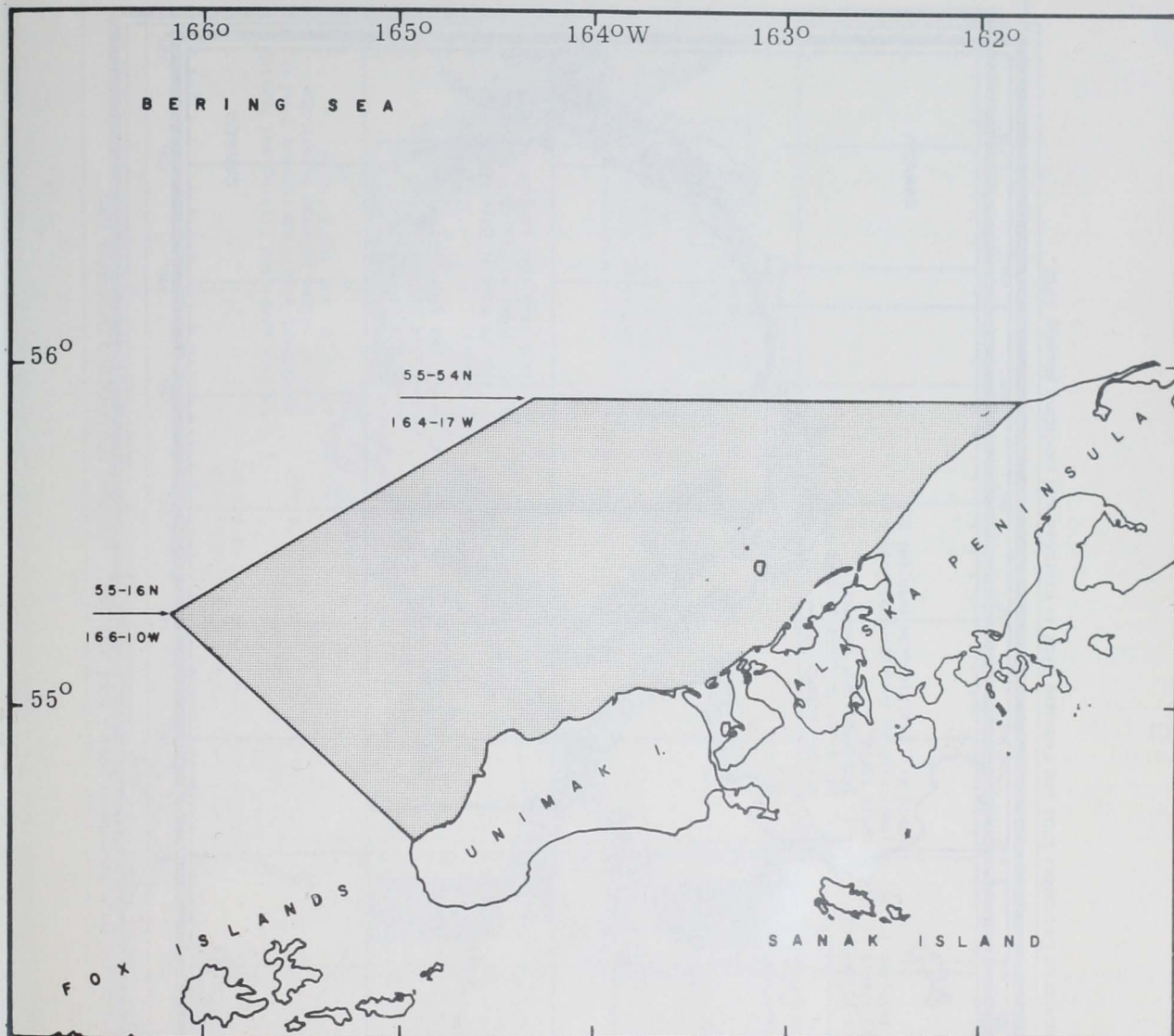


Fig. 1 - Eastern Bering Sea king crab pot sanctuary established by U.S.-Japan and U.S.-USSR Agreements.

Halibut Fishermen Further Protected

Gear interference and conflict between foreign fishing vessels and U.S. halibut vessels has been a problem. American halibut fishermen, for several years, have found it difficult to fish in areas of the Bering Sea because of the large numbers of foreign fishing vessels operating on the traditional halibut fishing grounds. The revised agreements provide for restrictions of Japanese fishing to avoid interfering with U.S. halibut fishing. These restrictions include a new commitment by the Japanese to refrain from trawling during darkness in an area of the eastern Bering Sea where U.S. fishermen are concentrated during the short period of the spring halibut season (figure 2). The extended agreements

continued the provisions for the 2 zones in the Gulf of Alaska, where the Japanese will refrain from fishing during the first weeks of the halibut season.

New Loading Zones Designated

In return for Japanese concessions on the high seas, the U.S. agreed to new areas in which Japanese vessels could conduct loading operations within the 3- to 12-mile contiguous fishery zone. Two new loading zones were provided the Japanese in the Gulf of Alaska: one off Afognak Island north of Kodiak, another off Forrester Island near Dixon Entrance.

Other provisions of the 1967 agreements with the Japanese were continued in force.

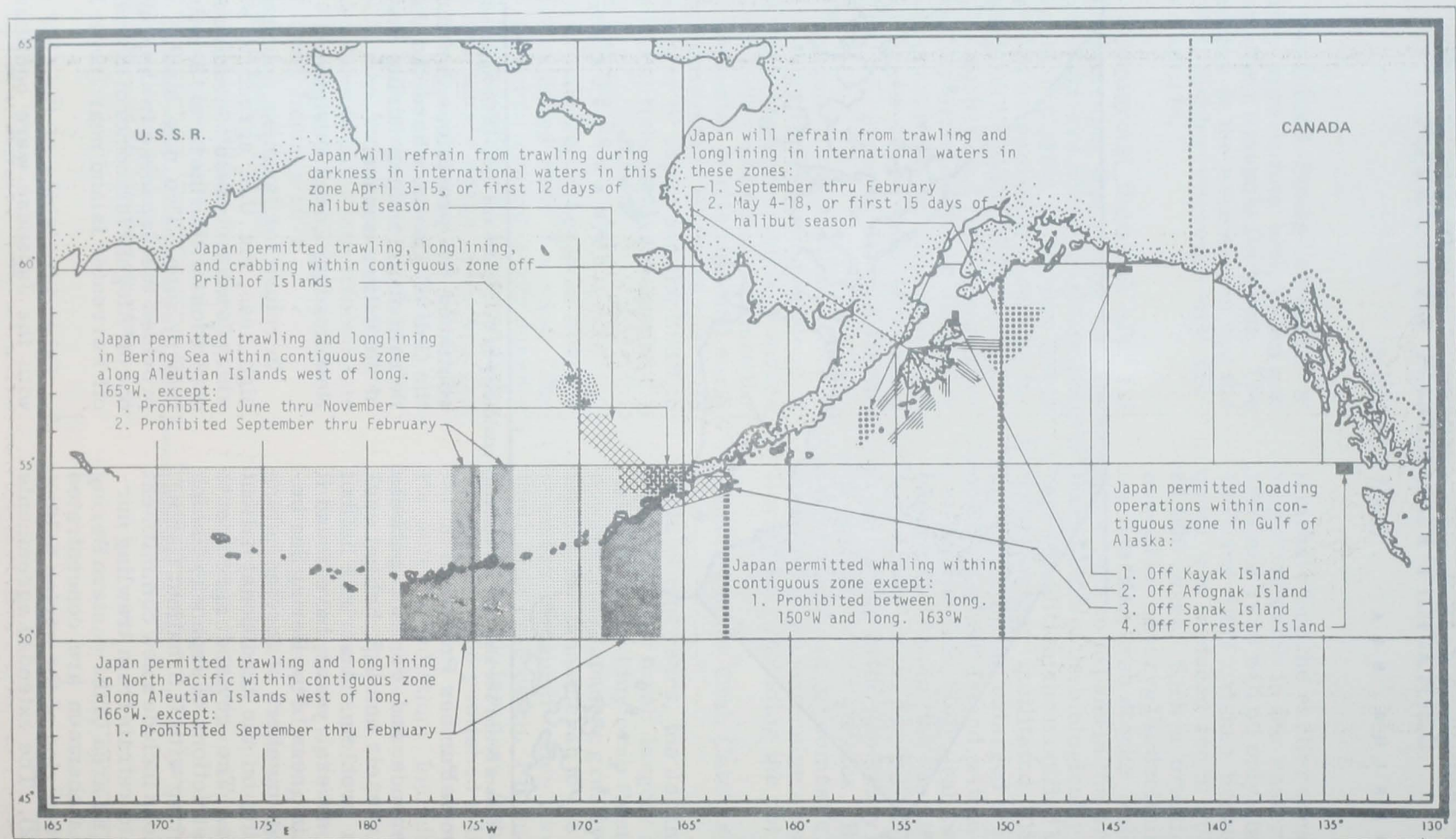


Fig. 2 - U.S.-Japan agreements implementing U.S. contiguous fishery zone May 1967, extended and modified December 1968.

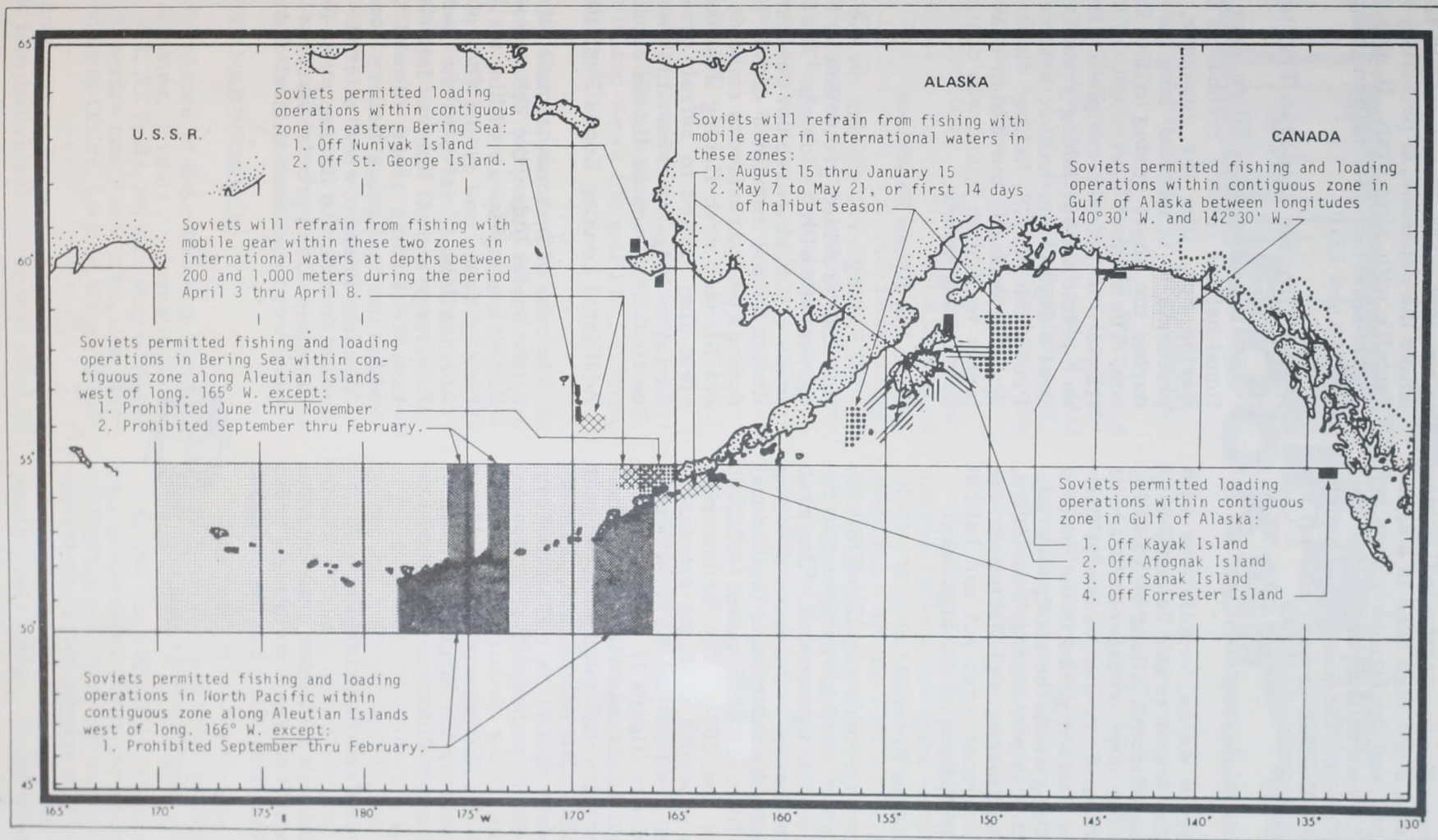


Fig. 3 - U.S.-USSR Fisheries Agreements of December 1964 and February 1967 as extended and modified January 1969.

Essentially, they afford protection to U.S. king crab fishermen on the high seas in 6 areas off Kodiak Island, and the Davidson Bank region south of Unimak Island; they permit the Japanese to fish within the contiguous fishery zone along the Aleutian Islands and off the Pribilof Islands.

Soviet Agreements

After nearly 4 weeks, negotiations with the Soviet Union ended in late January 1969 with the signing of modifications of 3 fishery agreements. The new arrangements are of 2-years' duration. They involve Soviet fishing for king and tanner crabs in the eastern Bering Sea; fishing within the contiguous fishery zone off the coasts of Alaska, Washington, Oregon, and California; and fishing in the vicinity of American crab pot and halibut longline concentrations on the high seas.

King Crab Catches Reduced

The new arrangements negotiated with the Soviets also were more advantageous to the U.S. than the earlier agreements. King crab fishing by the Soviets in the eastern Bering Sea was curtailed by reduction of their annual catch quota from 100,000 cases to 52,000 cases in 1969 and 1970. The Soviets also agreed to an expanded crab pot sanctuary; the boundaries are identical to those agreed to by the Japanese (figure 1). Provisions of the Soviet agreement not only prohibit fishing in the sanctuary with other than pot gear for king crab but also tanner crab. In addition, the Soviets agreed to refrain from trawling for other species within the sanctuary area. The latter provision should be beneficial to U.S. fishermen in the area faced with interference by the large Soviet winter flounder fishing expeditions north of the Alaska Peninsula.

Take of Tanner Crab Restricted

The Soviet catch of tanner crab from the U.S. Continental Shelf was also brought under control for the first time by the modified

agreement. The Soviet take of tanner crab unlike the Japanese, is primarily taken incidentally with king crab. It was limited to 40,000 cases (about 6 million crabs) annually in 1969 and 1970.

Halibut Grounds Closed to Trawlers

Soviet vessels operating near the traditional halibut fishing grounds in the eastern Bering Sea, like the Japanese, presented problems to American longline fishermen during the short spring halibut fishing season. The revised agreement calls for Soviet trawlers to refrain completely from fishing on 2 prime halibut fishing grounds during the first 6 days of the halibut season (figure 3). Protection of U.S. halibut fishermen from Soviet trawling in the 2 high-seas areas adjacent to Kodiak Island was continued in the new arrangements.

Crab Pot Areas Protected

U.S. king crab fishing on the high seas was also provided protection by the January agreements with the Soviets. The 6 high-seas areas of U.S. king crab pot concentrations off Kodiak Island remained closed to trawling during a period revised to coincide with present Alaskan crab fishing seasons. The Soviets also agreed to refrain from trawling during the king crab season in the same areas on Davidson Bank as did the Japanese.

Additional Loading Zones Permitted

In view of the concessions on the high seas by the Soviet Union, the U.S. agreed to 3 new Soviet loading areas within the contiguous fishery zone: one in the Gulf of Alaska off Afognak Island, and 2 in the Bering Sea off St. George and off Nunivak Islands. In addition, the fishing areas allowed the Soviets within the contiguous fishery zone along the Aleutian Islands were altered. They no longer coincide with the fishing zones provided by the Japanese. Other provisions of the 1967 agreement were continued without change.

