

## ICNAF Increases U.S. Fish Quota 16,600 MT; Names NOAA Official Vice Chairman

United States fishermen were granted a quota increase of 16,600 metric tons for 1975 at a summer meeting of the International Commission for the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries (ICNAF) in Halifax, Nova Scotia. ICNAF regulates certain fisheries in international waters off the northeast coast of the United States and Canada.

The primary purpose of the meeting was to allocate a 1975 overall catch quota and seek management arrangements for fish stocks for the 17 member nations, all of whom were represented except Romania. The overall quota applies to species fished in the southern portion of the Convention Area off the coast of New England and the Middle Atlantic States.

Although the overall quota was reduced from 924,000 metric tons in 1974 to 850,000 metric tons for 1975, the 1975 U.S. share of the total quota increased from 20 to 25 percent. With the exception of a modest increase for Canada, quotas of all other nations were reduced in order to provide the total required reduction of approximately 74,000 metric tons as agreed at an earlier meeting of the international group. For 1976, nations have agreed to set the overall quota at a level consistent with maintaining the maximum sustainable yield.

Other actions taken by the Commission included the election of David H. Wallace, Commissioner for the United States to ICNAF, to be Vice Chairman of the Commission, and an invitation to hold its next annual meeting in Edinburgh, Scotland, beginning 10 June 1975. Mr. Wallace is the Associate Administrator for Marine Resources of NOAA.

Scientific advisers for ICNAF met prior to the full meeting and provided the authoritative advice on which quotas were allocated. U.S. scientific advisers come from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service.

Because of the serious condition of

flounder stocks in the southern New England area, the United States proposed that additional protective measures be considered in conjunction with the recommended zero quota designed to improve further the effectiveness of existing gear regulations in this area. The aim is to reduce foreign incidental catches of yellowtail flounder and other groundfish stocks important to U.S. fishermen. Partial approval of the U.S. plan was obtained; an area off southern New England, where bottom trawling by large vessels is prohibited, was extended southward to waters off New Jersey, and additional vessels will be phased out of bottom trawling in the critical area by the end of 1976.

The United States maintained that

## NOAA Chief Sees Significant Progress in International Whale Preservation Measures

Although the United States did not achieve its goal of a 10-year moratorium on all commercial whaling, "significant progress" has been made in many aspects of international whale conservation, according to Dr. Robert M. White, U.S. Commissioner of the International Whaling Commission, and Administrator of the Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Progress was made in four major areas during last summer's 26th Session of the IWC in London, England, Dr. White noted. They are:

1. A selective moratorium will apply to any stock of whales that falls below optimum population levels.

2. World-wide quotas for whale species of most concern have been greatly reduced.

3. Whale stocks will be managed by ocean areas rather than oceans as a whole.

4. In establishing optimum stock levels, factors other than simple number of whales will be considered—factors that encompass the health of the total marine eco-

system, and that will lead to establishment of more conservative quota levels.

Consequently, it was agreed that a special meeting of the concerned member governments would be held in the fall of 1974 to resolve the remaining problems and that proposals adopted at that time would be forwarded for telegraphic vote by all Commission members.

Over 200 delegates attended the Halifax meeting representing Bulgaria, Canada, Denmark, France, Federal Republic of Germany, German Democratic Republic (attending for the first time as a full member), Iceland, Italy, Japan, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, United Kingdom, and the United States. Observers from Cuba attended and indicated Cuba's desire to join the Commission. Representatives of a number of other international fisheries organizations also attended.

Adoption of the principle of a selective moratorium represents a major change in the outlook for the preservation of the world's whales," said Dr. White. "Imposition of such a moratorium—suggested by the Australians as an amendment to the U.S. proposal for a 10-year moratorium on all whaling—will ensure the most rapid possible restoration of depleted whale stocks." The Commerce Department official noted that the action makes possible a moratorium for certain species, such as the fin whale, for longer than 10 years.

The world-wide quotas established by the Commission provide significant reductions in the allowed catch of several species. In the case of the fin whale, last year's quota has been reduced by 35 percent, from 2,000 to 1,300, with an anticipated reduction to zero for the 1975-76 whaling season. The quota for the sei whale has been reduced 20 percent, from 7,500

to 6,000. The sperm whale quota was maintained at last year's level of 23,000.

Only in the case of minke whales has the quota increased, from 5,000 to 7,000, on the assurance of scientists that this level will not seriously affect stocks of this small whale, which has only recently begun to be harvested.

The total number of whales that will be allowed by the quotas approved by the IWC for the next year total 37,300.

The agreement that all whale stocks will be managed by ocean areas, rather than for the oceans as a whole, will make possible much improved conservation and management by individual whale stocks. Quotas are established for each ocean area, rather than for the oceans as a whole. This means, for example, that if a whaling vessel catches its quota for an area, it may not catch additional whales in that area but must move to another. This provision eliminates the danger of seriously depleting individual stocks within an area, as has happened in the past.

The fourth area of major progress involves new methods for determining optimum population levels, and provides that factors such as the weight of the animals, the interaction among various species of whales and between whales and other living things, be considered.

"The progress achieved at this Commission meeting, while falling short of the U.S. objectives, is gratifying and is due to the recognition by member countries of the increasing need for improved conservation measures," Dr. White said. "A critical element in the changing attitude of the International Whaling Commission has been the advocacy of strong whale conservation measures by non-government environmental organizations both in the U.S. and in other countries.

"The United States remains concerned about many features of international whale management and conservation. Catch Per Unit of Effort of critical species of whales continues to fall. This is a warning signal that whaling stocks may be in less healthy shape than some data portray."

He also stated that in the U.S. view quotas are still being set too high,

particularly in view of the uncertainties in the base data and the risk of long-term or irreversible losses of the resource and the possibility that local stocks may be overfished.

"Finally," he noted, "the question of the humaneness of whale killing methods requires further examination."

In other actions at the meeting, the Commission decided to strengthen the Secretariat and its research activities. To that end it voted a budget increase from \$16,800 to \$86,400. There was agreement by all member countries for the first time to consider changes in the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling and a working party was established to undertake a thorough consideration of possible changes.

### **Scientific Attention Is on Bluefin Tuna**

Have populations of the spectacular bluefin tuna diminished to such a low point in the Atlantic as to threaten the continued use of the species as an important fisheries resource?

Answers to that and other questions about the giant fish are being sought in an expanded scientific investigation of bluefin tuna stocks in the Atlantic by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The program has been placed under the direction of the Southeast Fisheries Center (Miami, Fla.) of NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service.

The Commerce Department agency seeks to bring into close cooperation all states, organizations, and persons interested in the conservation of the bluefin tuna while assessing its status after years of heavy fishing by sport and commercial fishermen on both sides of the Atlantic. NMFS scientists are shaping their effort to culminate in the rapid establishment of a national bluefin management and conservation policy formulated to offset any declines in bluefin populations and revitalize the stocks. Various states are expected to play a significant part in the management program.

Contributory research is carried out at the NMFS Southwest Fisheries Center, La Jolla, Calif., and at the Northeast Fisheries Center, Woods Hole, Mass. Advising and assisting to

varying degrees in the stepped-up tuna investigation (the NMFS has been engaged in various kinds of tuna research for many years) are recreational and commercial tuna fishermen, state organizations, conservation agencies, and international advisory groups.

Sportfishermen traditionally begin looking for the giant bluefins around the Bahamas and the Florida Straits in May. As spring and summer wear on, the big fish become increasingly abundant off the eastern shore of the United States, and sport anglers and fishing clubs sponsor tournaments in various locations, beginning at Cat Cay in the Bahamas. Many of the tournaments date back to the 1930's, and some of these have been cancelled for the first time this year, in a positive response to conservation appeals by national gamefish organizations such as the International Game Fish Association (IGFA). Many sport groups are proposing tag and release tournaments both for expansion of data collecting and to try to save the fish. The bluefin season generally ends around October off the Canadian coast with a major tournament at Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, where anglers often catch tunas of enormous size. Last year, for instance, a record 1,120-pound bluefin was landed off Prince Edward Island.

Commercial bluefin catches have fluctuated significantly during the past several years: Smaller bluefin are caught commercially off the mid-Atlantic U.S. coast; the once-abundant European commercial catch is now greatly reduced; and some Asian nations, particularly Japan, value bluefin meat above all other tunas and now must import much of the desired supply at excessive cost.

Authoritative opinion as to the present status of the bluefin tuna stocks is somewhat divided. Some observers believe that populations of the giant species have been decimated by past fishing pressure; others suggest that the relatively fewer bluefin seen in recent years may be the result of a combination of natural population fluctuations and possible departures of the fish from customary migratory routes as well as fishing pressures. Differences of opinion can be traced to inexact knowledge of what constitutes a

naturally abundant bluefin population compared to a depleted one, migration variations of the extremely mobile species, biological factors, and effects of fishing pressure on the stocks.

Concern for the stocks is aggravated by recent catch figures: In 1973, the U.S. commercial catch of bluefin in the Atlantic dropped by one-third, from 1,490 metric tons in 1972; on the other hand, sport fishermen caught a record 659 heavyweight bluefins (about 250 tons of fish between 300 and 1,200 pounds) from 72 vessels (also a record) at a popular fishing tournament held in the fall of 1973 in northwest Atlantic waters. Some marine biologists have expressed concern over a possible shortage of medium-sized fish—the future breeders — noted in recent catches. They say that for some time most of the bluefin tuna caught have fallen into either the immature class (under 50 pounds) or the giant class (over 300 pounds).

The broad scientific exploration underway at NMFS laboratories seeks answers to many questions. A sampling might include:

1. What is the relation—or difference—between stocks of bluefin in the eastern and western Atlantic? How much migration occurs over what distances, and in what direction?
2. How old are the giant bluefins boated in the northwest Atlantic?
3. When, where, and under what circumstances do bluefin tuna spawn? What happens to the larval fish and what factors affect survival and growth? Are the medium-sized fish missing from today's catches at significant levels?
4. How soon can valid assessments of total stocks be reached through population dynamics studies?

Among the many tools to be used to assemble the needed data base are: expanded tuna-tagging programs; increased information on catch and effort from non-traditional sources such as the Japanese longline fleet; close working relationships with sport fishing clubs and organizations such as IGFA, Sport Fishing Institute, the National Coalition for Marine Conservation and others; logbooks to record sport catch data in many ports along the eastern seaboard and in the

Caribbean; aerial spotting surveys of bluefin schools; a greatly expanded exchange of information between American and European marine scientists; and continuing involvement

with the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna to coordinate studies leading to rational international management of Atlantic bluefin tuna.

## Commerce Department Denies Commercial Marine Mammal Kill Permits for Second Year

For the second successive year the Commerce Department has denied all requests for permits to kill marine mammals for commercial purposes, according to a recent report by Secretary Frederick B. Dent. The Secretary's second annual report to the Congress and the U.S. public on actions taken by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration with reference to marine mammals was delivered, as required, by 21 June 1974.

The extensive document (181 pages), submitted to the Senate and the House of Representatives, among other things delineates the reasons for, and the character of, several procedural or regulatory changes either proposed or made in the administration of the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972.

The Secretary's report also describes the circumstances surrounding the handling of a number of 92 applications so far received by NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service for permission to capture or otherwise acquire some 10,000 marine mammals, all to be used for scientific research or public display. Most of twenty approved applications involved the capture and release of almost 9,000 of the ocean-dwelling animals for scientific research; the next largest number of permits was granted to persons and organizations wishing to retain custody of animals for either scientific research or public display. Other applications have been denied, withdrawn, or referred to appropriate States for action; 65 of the 92 applications to take or use marine mammals in various ways awaited disposition as of the end of April.

The Act, which took effect in December 1972, is administered and enforced by NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service in matters related to porpoises, whales, seals, and sea

lions. Other marine mammals come under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior. The Act established, with some exceptions, a moratorium on the taking or importation of marine mammals and on the importation of marine mammal products.

The Act stipulates that a series of legal, scientific, and technological steps be taken by the Commerce and Interior Departments in a sustained effort to maintain—and if necessary rebuild—populations of marine mammals. It also requires that an annual accounting be made of the stewardship of the Act by the responsible Federal agencies.

The current report, in three parts, covers the period June 1973 through April 1974. The first part, "Actions Taken to Assure the Well-Being of Marine Mammals," describes the details surrounding: economic hardship exemptions; public display and scientific research permits; applications for waiver of the moratorium; research and development of fishing gear designed to prevent harm to porpoises associated with tuna fishing; research of fur seals on the Pribilof Islands in the Bering Sea; legal enforcement of the tenets of the Act; and international programs related to marine mammals.

The second part of the report, "Current Status of the Stocks of Marine Mammals," contains lists of marine species with which the NMFS is concerned, along with scientific information about those species compiled by many marine biologists. It also lists and summarizes existing marine mammal laws and regulations.

The third section contains appendices germane to recent marine mammal actions, regulations, and notices.

The text of the Secretary's report appeared in the *Federal Register* dated 24 June 1974 (39F.R.23895).