

## U.S. Fishery Exports Top \$1 Billion; Deficit Persists

United States seafood exports topped \$1 billion in 1980 for the second consecutive year, but the nation sustained a fisheries trade deficit of \$2.6 billion. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) said fishery exports exceeded the billion dollar mark by \$6 million. However, the agency said preliminary figures show imports totaling \$3.6 billion. NOAA noted that last year's deficit was below the all-time 1979 high of \$2.8 billion.

The agency said that although the 473,115 metric tons (t) of seafood products shipped during 1980 were 32 percent or 112,159 t above 1979 exports, they produced \$76 million or 7 percent less in revenues. Edible seafoods valued at \$904 million accounted for 90 percent of all exports, but were down 11 percent or \$116 million from 1979. Nonedible fishery exports, mostly fish meal and oil, totaled 212,801 t and were valued at \$102 million.

Japan again was the country's largest customer, purchasing 228 million pounds of edible products, or 40 percent of all exports, at a cost of \$406 million. However, the Japanese bought fewer and less costly products than a year earlier; thus the dollar value of their purchases declined \$162 million.

Pacific Ocean salmon was the most valuable export last year. It accounted for \$357 million, or 40 percent of all foreign sales. The Commerce Department noted a \$21 million increase in exports to four countries that U.S. trade missions visited last year to promote fisheries sales, especially stocks not favored by American consumers.

Italy, Spain, South Korea, and Portugal mainly bought these "under-utilized" species.

### U.S. Albacore and Hawaii Skipjack Landings Down

Relatively poor fishing success marked the U.S. albacore fishery for the second consecutive year in 1980, according to Michael Laurs, Leader of the Albacore Fishery Program at the NMFS Southwest Fishery Center's La Jolla Laboratory. Landings through October 1980 were estimated to total a little over 8,000 tons. This is only slightly higher than the total landings made in 1979, and considerably below the seasonal 10-year average of about 23,000 tons.

There appear to be a number of factors contributing to the low landings of albacore in 1980 including: 1) The late arrival of the northern substock of fish into waters off the Pacific Northwest; 2) the failure of the fishery to develop fully off southern and central California despite an initial early appearance of fish; 3) the low availability of 12- to 15-pound (5.5 to 6.8 kg) fish off California south of Cape Mendocino (this size of fish normally makes up a significant portion of the U.S. catch), 4) fish not biting, in particular in the Cortes Bank and San Juan Seamount areas and off central California, and 5) high winds and rough seas hampering fishing effort, notably off California.

Some of the most consistent catches during the 1980 season were made during the last half of October. A fleet of approximately 75-100 jig and baitboats operated in the area

centered approximately 140 miles off the coast between Pt. Sur and Pt. Arena. Catches were generally 0.5-0.75 tons per day for jigboats and 1-5 tons per day for baitboats, with top daily scores of about 1 ton for jigboats and 9 tons for baitboats. The fish caught were large, ranging mostly between 25 and 35 pounds (11.4 and 15.9 kg), with some fish over 50 pounds (22.7 kg) being landed. The catches were reported to have been made in waters with sea surface temperatures of 60°-61°F (15.6°-16.1°C).

Meanwhile, November 1980 Hawaii landings of skipjack tuna were estimated at 84.1 metric tons (t) and the December landings were estimated at 47.2 t. The cumulative landings for 1980 (January through December) were estimated at 1,470.7 t, which is 1,265.9 t below the 1979 landings and 2,092.7 t below the 1964-79 long-term annual average. Source: *Tuna Newsletter*.

### Gulf, East Coast Marine Anglers: 300 Million Fish

Approximately 8.5 million salt-water recreational fishermen caught more than 298 million fish along the U.S. Atlantic and Gulf coasts during 1979, a NOAA survey shows. Most of the fish, approximately 192 million, were caught by anglers fishing from their own or rented boats. The number of fish caught at other locations were: Piers and jetties, 55.6 million; beaches, riverbanks, and sounds, 32.3 million; and from party and charter boats, 18.2 million. Half of the fish were caught in sounds, rivers, and bays.

The bluefish, *Pomatomus saltatrix*, was the most popular species. More than 27 million were caught, 15 million of them in New York, New Jersey, Delaware, and Virginia. Other major species caught off the two coasts included flounder, seatrout, spot, and croaker. More than 33,000 fishermen and 7,000 coastal area households were contacted during the survey conducted for NMFS.

# Progress in Sea Turtle Protection

## New Device Prevents Sea Turtle Drownings

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has invented a mechanism to allow sea turtles to escape unharmed from shrimp nets without any appreciable loss of shrimp. "The device is a major step in the conservation of sea turtles," said Terry L. Leitzell, NOAA's Assistant Administrator for Fisheries. "Tests conducted by the National Marine Fisheries Service show that almost 90 percent of the turtles caught in the shrimp net escape when the device is used."

NOAA estimates that more than 2,000 sea turtles died along the East Coast last year. All were on the endangered or threatened species list. NMFS, the industry, and conservation groups have been working for several years to reduce turtle mortalities.

The device is installed in the throat of the shrimp net. As the sea turtle enters, it is deflected downward by bars which prevent it from entering the back end of the net. The vertical bars are angled to the rear and downward, forcing the turtle to settle on a

trap door that opens under its weight and releases it through the bottom of the net. The device is expected to cost about \$200 installed.

A NMFS laboratory in Mississippi developed the device over a 3-year period, testing it on shrimp vessels off South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. The device also can be modified to allow fishermen more selectivity in the size and species of fish they catch. The NMFS is collecting information on the construction, handling, and use of the device for distribution to the shrimp industry.

## Unique Headstart Program Aims to Save Sea Turtles

A species of sea turtle thought headed for extinction 3 years ago, may be on the road to recovery, thanks to a unique "headstart" program developed by NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service. Since 1978, aquaculture specialists at a NMFS Southeast Fisheries Center laboratory in Texas have been raising hatchlings of the Kemp ridley turtle through the dangerous first year of life.

About 95 percent of this year's crop of turtles has survived, reports James P. McVey, aquaculture division chief at the center's Galveston, Tex., laboratory and chief scientist on the headstart project. McVey estimates that less than 5 percent normally survive their first year in the ocean.

"All sea turtles are subject to intense predation," McVey said. "A baby turtle is a bite-sized morsel with no defenses. During that first year, until they become strong swimmers, they drift at the mercy of winds and currents which can take them into shipping channels or polluted harbors."

The Kemp, or Atlantic ridley, is one of seven sea turtles protected under the 1973 Endangered Species Act. Its primary western hemisphere nesting spot is a Mexican beach often raided by poachers seeking the ridley's eggs for their supposed aphrodisiac powers. More than 40,000 females nested on the beach in 1947. Despite a 15-year-old Mexican government program to protect the nests, only 200-500 nesting females remained there by 1978.

Now, in cooperation with the Mexican Instituto Nacional de Pesca, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service collects a few eggs each year for NOAA. These eggs are incubated in nests at Padre Island National Seashore. After hatching they are taken to the Galveston Laboratory and raised in tanks during the first year. This year's crop was released in May at Padre Island, McVey said. It brought the total number of hatchlings "headstarted" to more than 3,000.

Whether "headstarting" can save the Kemp's ridley from extinction will not be known for several more years, when the first group is expected to return to breed. However, the headstart program will continue to provide a captive brood stock of this endangered species, should it ever be faced with immediate extinction from some environmental disaster, McVey said.

*Lepidochelys kempi* photograph by Larry Ogren.

