

STATEMENT OF PROVISIONAL POLICY  
ON UTILIZATION OF HERRING RESOURCES

#76-13-FB  
Page 1 of 2

NEED FOR POLICY

Policy to provide direction on the utilization of herring resources is necessitated by reactivation in recent years of the herring fishery - primarily for roe extraction. Although tremendously large historic harvests were taken for oil and meal reduction purposes, these fisheries eventually faded leaving only the bait fishery operative. More recently, strong demands in foreign markets for highly prized herring roe abruptly created a lucrative spring "roe fishery" in addition to the fall and winter bait and food fishery.

Present harvests of herring for all purposes are a mere fraction of sustained historic harvests. Although past levels of abundance are not necessarily indicative of what may be currently harvested on a sustained basis, it is generally believed that a considerable increase in the harvest of herring stocks is possible with a more thorough assessment of both presently fished stocks and assessment of stocks known to exist but which are not presently fished.

A further complicating factor is that this single species may provide at least two economically independent products (i. e. processed roe versus processed body meat) depending on the season when the harvest is made. The harvest of this rather unique resource, then, requires regulations which effectively allocate fish to different utilizations by time as well as quota.

Additionally, there is opposition to the use of herring for any purpose other than as a natural forage fish for other commercial species such as salmon and halibut. Therefore, unlike other commercial fisheries within the state, there exists a highly vocal constituency who do not participate in the fishery.

A tremendously strong demand for herring exists and a supply of the resource is available. Policy then, is required to guide development of the fishery through conflicting thoughts on (1) the harvesting of any herring, (2) the allocation of herring between two economically independent fisheries, and (3) the degree of utilization required for roe herring carcasses. Conflicts must not be allowed to stymie this fishery.

CONSIDERATIONS

Having established the need for policy, considerations which must be addressed prior to formalization of any management plan affecting utilization of herring include:

- 1) The statutory responsibility of the department is to manage and extend fish resources in the interest of the economy and general well-being of the state. In this regard, economic benefits may be derived in numerous ways, (a) through the actual harvesting of herring (b) through the processing of the harvest, (c) through active fisheries dependent on bait herring, and (d) through development of industries within the state utilizing herring meal for fish and animal food.

- 2) After harvesting, the greatest economic benefits accrue to Alaskan communities when the most complete processing occurs locally.
- 3) In the processing of herring for roe, the common technique of local roe extraction with subsequent non-consumptive fate of herring carcasses provides greater economic benefits to Alaskan communities than the export of herring in the round for full utilization elsewhere.
- 4) Although quality is measurably reduced, spring herring taken for roe extraction may be used for oil, meal, or fillets.
- 5) Since herring fishing for roe extraction is a developing industry, much basic decision making information is simply not yet available. The current and potential economic contribution of herring to coastal communities should be investigated. A comparison of the relative values that may be derived from different types of utilization is needed. Additionally, a comparison of costs of preparing different kinds of products would be beneficial. And ideally, a method of deriving benefit-cost information for consideration of department herring programs would be useful.
- 6) A further vital consideration is House Concurrent Resolution No. 75 and the subsequent Alaska Board of Fish and Game directive to "phase out the wasteful herring sac roe fishery of the state."

As some of the above considerations are diametrically opposed, not all of these thoughts can be fully satisfied in development of policy statements.

#### POLICY DIRECTION

Fully cognizant that this provisional policy may be altered as many of the above considerations are resolved through acquisition of additional information, the department must adopt a flexible management policy. To this end, the department will foster increased harvest levels of the herring resource only insofar as consistent with biological productivity and increased stock assessment capabilities.

Regarding utilization trends as affected by department regulations governing season and quota, the fall and winter high quality herring "food" and bait fishery will be permitted to continue as will the spring "roe" fishery. With regard to the roe fishery, however, the logical growth toward fullest potential (i.e. increased harvest levels) must be dependent upon industry trends toward full utilization of herring carcasses after roe extraction.

To this end, the department will undertake steps to determine economic potentials and costs associated with different herring fisheries (including gear for harvests) and utilization forms. Every effort will be made to foster the fullest utilization of herring at the local level consistent with economic viability of the industry and consistent with state regulations governing food sanitation.