



# DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

## INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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Immediate adoption of adequate remedial measures will not only prevent an imminent drastic decline in the New England haddock fishery, but would actually result in an increase of at least 50 percent above its present \$5,000,000 annual value to fishermen.

Based upon just completed studies of William C. Herrington, aquatic biologist in charge of North Atlantic Fisheries Investigations for the Fish and Wildlife Service, United States Department of the Interior, the statement will appear in his yet unpublished report, A Crisis in the Haddock Fishery.

A Crisis is the promised follow-up to Herrington's recent warning letter to all trawler captains to "stay off baby ("round scrod") haddock grounds" or suffer serious future economic losses. The forthcoming report is a handbook to inform fishermen in how far and what ways their livelihood is threatened, and what measures are necessary to maintain and improve their fishery.

Causes of the current emergency are old and new, Herrington, will say. They are caught up with factors involving alarming decreases in abundance of spawning stock over the past decade, and the 1941 galloping increases in development of the baby haddock fishery. During the winter of 1940-41, the

price for round scrod increased to a profitable level, and some otter trawlers began fishing particularly for them. The marketed catch jumped from a few thousand pounds in November 1940, to 2 million pounds in February, for example, paralleling the incredible rise in the rosefish industry.

Of all the haddock grounds, the most productive has been the South Channel-Georges Bank area. This area comprises about 20,000 square miles of fishing ground. It has yielded an annual catch that reached a peak of nearly 230,000,000 pounds (gutted weight) in 1929, then declined to approximately 105,000,000 pounds in 1939 and 93,000,000 pounds in 1940.

These catch fluctuations, according to the biologists, have been due mainly to changes in the amount of fishing and in abundance of the haddock itself. The rises and falls due to changes in amount of fishing are traced to a variety of economic causes—seasonal lack or supply of boats, principally—in Herrington's analysis.

"The increases and declines in total haddock," he points out, "are due to changes in scrod abundance, for in each instance increases in total haddock occur in the years following big catches of scrod, while declines in total haddock follow years of small scrod catches. This fact indicates simply that increases in abundance can occur only following years in which large numbers of young were produced, and that following years of poor production of young the total abundance must decline as the result of losses due to natural mortality and the commercial fishery. With an understanding of the major factors that control the production and survival of young haddock, the catch records again may be examined to determine the reasons for the continued low abundance and low catch in recent years."

The examination reveals two causes:

(1) The fishery is taking smaller fish than formerly, with the result that although the annual catch in pounds of fish since 1931 averaged considerably smaller than the average for 1925-26, the catch in number of fish averaged nearly 35 percent greater than for 1925-26. If the fishery in recent years had been restricted to the larger haddock, a considerably larger poundage would have been available from the same number of fish.

(2) The very intensive fishery in 1929-31 reduced the spawning stock to less than one-half of its most productive level. Consequently, even though the fishing intensity on Georges Bank since 1931 has averaged little more than half that in 1929-31, the number of haddock has not increased materially because of the reduced supply of young.

Thus, concludes Herrington, it is clear that the rapidly growing fishery for baby haddock threatens the future productivity of the whole haddock industry.

"If this practice is continued it will further reduce the size of haddock from the average of 2.4 pounds in 1938 to perhaps 1.7 pounds or less within the next few years. With the same average number of young produced as during 1932-40, the total annual catch that could be obtained regularly from this area would drop from the present 90,000,000- to 100,000,000-pound level to about 60,000,000 to 70,000,000 pounds, representing a loss to the fishermen of more than \$1,000,000 (based on 1940 prices). Furthermore, the data show that the production of young will decrease proportionately if the spawning stock is reduced further by the capture of small, immature haddock."

This trend, combined with the lower average size of market fish, must cause the total yield from the South Channel-Georges Bank area to drop considerably below the 60,000,000- to 70,000,000-pound level. The result will be smaller trips, much higher production costs, greatly reduced supplies for the market, fewer and smaller fish for filleting, and fewer jobs for fishermen and shore crews. In addition, the decreased supplies and higher costs will result in loss of markets to other kinds of fish and other foodstuffs.