



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

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INTERIOR REPORT INDICATES POSSIBILITY OF SEA LION INDUSTRY

Research to control the Steller sea lion which too often wreaks havoc on fishing gear and catches during harvest time and which is accused of preying on valuable fishing stocks at other times may result in a new industry, according to a report issued recently by the Department of the Interior.

The bulletin summarizes an experimental sea lion harvest conducted by a commercial fishing company under contract with the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries, Fish and Wildlife Service. Pertinent information from earlier biological studies is included in the report.

The experimental harvest yielded more than 200 tons of high-protein ground meat which was sold through established channels to fur farmers feeding mink. The report notes a big demand for high-protein, low-fat, meat by the fur farms and fish hatcheries of western and midwestern States. Possibilities for other uses exist but these are dependent upon a stable annual harvest. Sea lion meat is about 73 percent water, five percent fat, and more than 20 percent protein.

Numerous complaints have been made by fishermen and fishing companies for a number of years concerning the depredations of sea lions. There has been no incentive to control the sea lion by annual harvest because the hide is practically valueless for commercial use and because there was little or no apparent market for the meat commensurate with the cost of harvest.

The Bureau of Commercial Fisheries studies and those conducted by the Fisheries Research Institute of the University of Washington and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game indicate that there are enough sea lions in Alaskan water to support a commercial operation. There are an estimated 150,000 sea lions in the Alaska area. The Bureau says in its report "providing that facilities for processing can be improved the potential for a commercial operation is high". The Bureau recommends that specialized equipment should be used to reduce the amount of labor required to process the 2000 pound carcasses.

An additional hazard is the weather, the report says. During the breeding season, which is the best time to harvest, the sea lions occupy rookeries along the windswept Alaska Peninsula. At times inclement weather makes harvesting impossible.

During the experimental harvest the harem bulls composed most of the kill. Their places were taken immediately by bachelor bulls. Harvest of male animals would likely not decrease the herd appreciably for a long while. If studies indicate that a sharp reduction in the herd is necessary, the harvest would have to include female sea lions.

Anyone interested in commercial harvest of sea lions should acquaint himself with both the Federal and Alaska State fishery regulations.

A limited number of the publication, Special Scientific Report--Fisheries No. 371, is available at the Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, Washington 25, D. C.

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