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Productivity of our most valuable North Atlantic fishery is seriously threatened by new developments in fishing practices and markets, according to Circular 4, A Crisis in the Haddock Fishery, released today by the Fish and Wildlife Service, United States Department of the Interior.

This fishery is based upon the vast but limited stocks of haddock found on the fishing grounds off the North Atlantic coast. In 1940 these yielded a catch of nearly 137,000,000 pounds, representing an income of about $5,000,000 shared by fishermen from eastern Maine to Fulton Market, New York. Now, both yield and income are imperiled, however, unless certain protective measures are taken. If immediately adopted, the decline, says the haddock report, not only might be stopped dead, but even the present income increased at least 50 percent.

During the winter of 1940-41, according to William C. Herrington, biologist in charge of North Atlantic Fisheries Investigations, and author of the Crisis, there developed within the space of a few months changes in this industry which, "if continued, will reduce greatly the productivity of this resource and adversely affect the welfare of the fisherman, marketman, and consumer."

These new developments reflect in recent unprecedented captures and marketing of baby haddock due to its price increase to a profitable level. From a negligible poundage in November 1940, the marketed catch skyrocketed to over 6,000,000 pounds in the first six months of 1941. Thus, this fishery appears to have initiated a practice which, if continued, must result in the capture of most of the young haddock before they have completed more than a fraction of their normal growth. As a result, the productivity of the fishing grounds will be reduced greatly.

"Such a practice," Herrington warns trawler captains, "corresponds to the cattle rancher marketing most of his stock as calves, or the hog-farmer selling his stock as quarter-grown shoats. This does not pay the rancher or farmer, even though he must continue to feed his stock. Why, then, should it pay the fisherman, when nature provides the feed?"

The variations in total haddock, studies show, follow changes in scrod abundance. When increases in total haddock have occurred in the years following big catches of scrod, declines in total haddock have followed years of small scrod catches. Thus, increases in abundance can occur only 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.

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, says the Herrington analysis, 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 a 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."

"On the basis of the evidence," the Service biologist points out, "it is possible to state definitely that under adequate and practical management measures which would protect young haddock until their rapid growth is completed, and which would build up the spawning stock to the most productive level, annual production from the South Channel-Georges Bank area not only can be maintained but can be increased greatly, possibly to double its recent level—that is, to nearly 200,000,000 pounds. Certainly it can be increased to 150,000,000 pounds. With such an incentive, the various groups of producers and marketers should find it well worth while to assist in developing and applying practical management measures which will make this goal possible."

Measures which will be of material help in producing the desired results and are practical to apply, are "limited in number," according to the report. The most promising appear to be: (1) Require all boats fishing for haddock to use a mesh of such size that most of the haddock below 2 pounds will escape. (This suggestion would require a mesh with an inside stretched diameter of about 4 inches, after shrinkage; or a diameter of about 5¼ inches between knot centers, new netting.) (2) Establish closed areas to protect the principal nursery grounds. (3) Prohibit the sale of haddock below 2 pounds in weight.

On the basis of past experience with measures of this kind, according to the Crisis, it appears certain that to make them effective they must be backed by Federal legislation or international treaty. For Georges Bank, which during the last 10 or 15 years has been fished only by United States boats, probably Federal legislation would be sufficient. To extend the regulations to the Nova Scotian

banks, however, international action might prove desirable, although at the present time the Canadian fleet includes no otter trawlers."

"The above measures may appear drastic to those accustomed to thinking in terms of wholly unrestricted operations," says Herrington finally. "When the alternatives are considered, however, it should be obvious that some definite action of the kind suggested must be taken. If the fishery continues its present course without hindrance, and the taking of small haddock continues and increases, the tremendous production of the haddock fishery in the South Channel-Georges Bank area will decrease in both quantity and quality until the annual catch may be reduced to less than 50,000,000 or 60,000,000 pounds and is made up principally of scrod haddock and baby haddock--fish weighing less than 2½ pounds each. Such a decrease will occur within the next few years, not 15 or 20 years from now.

"On the other hand, if adequate remedial measures are adopted in the near future, not only will a drastic decline in the catch be prevented, but actually an increase of at least 50 percent will result. This increase represents a difference in yield of 100,000,000 pounds or more, which at 1940 prices would bring the fishermen about $4,000,000. The proposed measures will be of major assistance in achieving this result."

The entire haddock problem here presented is important primarily to fishermen, fish dealers, processors, and to all boat owners; particularly those with boats whose cruising radius prevents their fishing distant grounds, such as Quereau and the Newfoundland Banks. Moreover, in view of the approaching production emergency due to requirements for national defense, any action that will prevent an increase in cost and a decrease in supply of food is bound to be of importance to all consumers of fish.

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