McHugh - Int. 4106, or McKernan - Int. 4993

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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AEC LICENSES NEW FISH MIGRATION STUDY TECHNIQUE

Plans for the use of a low-level radioactive metal tag to aid in the study of the migration of some species of fish such as herring and menhaden caught in such quantities that customary tagging methods are impractical, were announced today by the Department of the Interior.

For use with the new tag, which is inserted in the body cavity, there is special detecting equipment which can spot tagged fish as it travels along the conveyor line in the processing plant and divert the batch of fish containing the tagged fish into a special compartment where additional detectors point out the individual fish carrying the tag.

Donald L. McKernan, Director of the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries, Fish and Wildlife Service, explained the techniques today when he announced that the Atomic Energy Commission, after thoroughly investigating the proposal, issued a license to the Bureau. Mr. McKernan stated that the Food and Drug Administration had also approved the project.

Before issuing the license, the Atomic Energy Commission not only assured itself of the efficiency of the detecting equipment but also determined that if a tag, for any reason, evaded the detector it would attach itself magnetically to the machinery used in the processing. Because the tag is made of Alnico V, a highly magnetic metal, it would be picked up by the electromagnet in the production line even if the tag were broken.

The knowledge of the migration pattern of the various species of fish is one of the things necessary for the intelligent harvest of the crops of the sea. In species such as menhaden and herring which are caught and processed in quantities, considerable biological data have been lost because of failure to recover the old-style tags.

Mr. McKernan stated that the likelihood of any member of the general public ever coming in contact with a tag or part of a tag is practically non-existent but that even should such an eventuality occur the tags are of such low-level activity that no hazard would be presented.

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