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INTERIOR DEPARTMENT'S ANNUAL REPORT SHOWS DECLINE IN COMMERCIAL FISH CATCH

Although United States landings of fish and shellfish in 1963 were well below the 1962 catch of 5.2 billion pounds, the Nation continued to rank fifth among fishing countries of the world, according to the Department of the Interior's Annual Report for 1963.

Until 1956, the United States had been outranked in volume of catch only by Japan. Since that year, the United States catch has declined while a number of other countries have increased their catches. The United States now trails Japan, Peru, Red China, and Russia.

The report points out that the decline in United States fisheries has been due primarily to greatly reduced landings of menhaden which are used in the manufacture of fish meal and oil, salmon in Alaska, tuna in California, and ocean perch in New England.

During the past five years, United States fishermen have received about $360 million annually for their catch. Imported products, consisting largely of manufactured items, have been valued at an average of $385 million. Consumers pay over $1,100 million each year for domestically caught items and nearly $650 million for imported products.

The Annual Report notes one of the latest research programs of the Fish and Wildlife Service's Bureau of Commercial Fisheries on irradiation pasteurization of fish. This research has demonstrated that low-level irradiation can extend the refrigerated shelf life of various fishery products up to 30 days. In the future, it may be possible to ship fresh, unfrozen fish fillets, clam and crab meats from sea coast ports to midwestern markets, where fresh fish are in short supply.

The Department's Annual Report also discusses the work of several International Commissions of which the United States is a member. These Commissions join various countries together to conserve the resources of the sea. Activities of the International North Pacific Fur Seal Commission, the International Pacific Halibut Commission, the International Pacific Salmon Fisheries Commission, and the International Commission for the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries are all covered by the report.

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