

200-Mile Limit 'No Good for Florida Fishermen'

By Robert P. Jones
Executive Secretary
Southeastern Fisheries Assn. Inc.

TALLAHASSEE - The Florida Times Union editorial of Oct. 11, entitled "Sea Use Actions Are Needed," pretty well reflects the thinking of the New Englanders who are so hopped up on unilateral action by the U.S. Congress.

In our opinion it does not reflect the feelings of us here in Florida who will be affected the most by any unilateral action. As a case in point, during the last session of Congress, the American lobster was declared a "creature of the Continental shelf" and, as such, was reserved exclusively for the American fishermen.

There is doubt in the minds of many scientists that the American lobster is, in fact, a creature of the shelf.

Also, according to statistics furnished by the National Marine Fisheries Service, about 74 percent of all American lobsters are caught inside 12 miles of American shores. However, after Congress enacted this unnecessary piece of legislation, the Bahamian government, we have been informed, is about to declare the spiny lobster a creature of its continental shelf and will expel several hundred American boats from fishing in what heretofore has been considered the high seas (that is, seas more than 12 miles from any Bahamian land).

About half of the spiny lobster production landed in Florida is taken from the high seas.

Needless to say, that unilateral action has already hurt the Florida distant-water spiny lobster fishery and if Congress enacts Senator Magnuson's bill, the distant-water shrimp, snapper and grouper fisheries will also be hurt.

The U.S. domestic catch of fishery products has remained rather static since 1960. Also, the shrimp industry is the most valuable fishery in the country and has continued to improve its gear and equipment in order to better compete.

Also, in 1972, which are the latest statistics available for review, commercial fishery landings at U.S. ports by U.S. fishermen were 4.7 billion pounds valued at a record \$703.6 million at the vessel level.

Your editorial fails to mention that many industries, such as the shrimp, snapper, grouper, spiny -lobster, tuna, salmon and others, were founded on the principle that the high seas were the property of everyone and that renewable resources should be harvested to the maximum or optimum sustainable yield.

This is our view. This is not to say that some segments of the commercial fishing industry are not in trouble, particularly those in New England, but their troubles are more than foreign competition. They have overcapitalized some of their fisheries.

They have not kept up with modern vessels. They have union problems and they have insurance problems that defy solution.

As our organization sees it, the answer for management of the high seas will only come about from an international agreement. We doubt that the U.S. will go to war over fisheries, even though it might over innocent passage."

We also think that Senator Magnuson's unilateral legislation won't be very effective as a big stick.

One of the biggest sticks over the years could have been foreign aid but, as you well know, our government doesn't like to attach strings to foreign aid because the governments to whom we are giving might not be as friendly as they should if we tried for a "quid pro quo."

The Southeastern Fisheries Association is committed to a species approach to management of the marine resources, which, if undertaken properly, would offer much greater protection for coastal states than a 200-mile line.

But the species approach is much harder to explain and to understand, so proponents of a unilateral 200-mile line have just been saying, "Pass Magnuson's bill and keep those Communists from taking all our resources."

This is certainly a lot easier to sell than a species approach to management but it is not better for the commercial fishing industry here in Florida nor is it better for the animals we are both trying to protect.

We just wanted everyone to know that there is another side to this complicated subject and that, in our opinion, an unenforceable, ill-defined, unilaterally sponsored 200-mile line off our coast is not the answer to this situation.

Published in the St. Augustine Record, October 20, 1974