



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

OFFICE OF THE COORDINATOR OF FISHERIES

For Immediate Release

As a further move in his program to encourage greater fish production, Coordinator of Fisheries Harold L. Ickes said today that Florida's regulations against use of purse seines in inshore fisheries and the closed season on mullet have both been suspended for the duration by proclamation of Governor Spessard L. Holland. Under the Governor's program, the use of purse seines for taking food fish will be strictly controlled and in no way jeopardize conservation aims.

These measures were effected, the Coordinator explained, as the result of studies carried on by expert fishery biologists attached to the Office of the Coordinator, and based on recommendations made recently to Governor Holland in an effort to help solve the Nation's critical food problems. The studies made showed that the fish catch of Florida was only 10 percent of normal in certain areas where fish are plentiful, due to imposition of certain Naval restrictions and shortages in men and equipment.

Previous to 1931, purse seines were permitted to operate in Florida waters for the purpose of catching various species of commercial fish. During the depth of the depression, there was a very considerable over-production of fish in the State, and the common-net fishermen were unable to compete with the more efficient purse-seine fishermen. The purpose of the law passed in 1931 prohibiting the use of purse seines for catching any species other than menhaden was to make employment for the large number of gill-net fishermen who had no other means of livelihood. At the same time, it was felt that by reducing the excess production, the price would be raised to a more reasonable level.

The present Navy and Coast Guard restrictions on night fishing require that the boats not leave shore before sunrise and that they return to shore before sunset. Under normal circumstances, approximately 90 percent of the fish produced are caught at night, and these restrictions therefore reduced the potential production, by previous legal methods, to approximately 10 percent of normal. Although it might appear that additional effort during daylight would overcome this diminished production, the situation is just the reverse, Governor Holland explained, since war industry and military requirements have reduced the number of fishermen available.

The areas affected materially by suspension of the purse-seine regulations are about 150 miles of coast near Miami, and a few miles in the Pensacola area. The species produced, in order of their importance, are Spanish mackerel, mullet, bluefish, and pompano. These fish are caught both by gill-netters and purse-seiners. It is estimated that the Miami region, alone, could produce an additional five to ten million pounds of fish during the next eight or ten months, thus augmenting the supplies needed to meet the growing demand for fish due to increased population in that and nearby areas.

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