



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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SHRIMP REPORT POINTS OUT DOMESTIC PRODUCTION PROBLEMS

An increasing number of craft sharing a fairly stable domestic shrimp resource, and increasing domestic competition from shrimp fisheries developing in many parts of the world, are among the problems facing the American shrimper, according to a report just issued by the Department of the Interior.

The report was prepared by the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries, Fish and Wildlife Service, in accordance with a provision of the Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956. This provision authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to make a report--when requested--with respect to any fishery product imported into the United States; to determine whether there have been any downward trends in prices, production or employment; and to determine whether there has been an increase in imports of that product.

The request was made by the National Shrimp Congress, Inc., an organization whose members produce more than 70 percent of American-caught shrimp.

In releasing the report, Under Secretary Elmer F. Bennett said that it is not purported to be a complete economic study of the shrimp fishery. "It would have been desirable to have made a more thorough economic study of the industry, but neither time nor resources would permit such detailed effort," he said.

"Accurately projecting the course of world production and expansion of exports of shrimp by foreign nations will require more information than is available in this report," Mr. Bennett said. "For these reasons any policy decisions of this Department, particularly with respect to tariff policy, should be based upon additional data and more complete analysis."

The report shows that in recent years there has been an increase in the number of shrimp boats, but no change in production other than the normal annual fluctuations in the resource; there has been a decrease in the gross earnings per boat; the discovery of new shrimp areas has resulted in the construction of more seaworthy larger vessels; increased construction costs are noted; employment has increased at a greater rate than the increase in the number of vessels, mainly because the larger vessels require larger crews; and there has been a substantial increase in the amount of shrimp imported into the country.

One of the significant things noted in the report is that until the price to the shrimp fisherman dropped in 1959 there had been sufficient increase in prices to more or less balance off the decreasing catch per boat. Also, price decreases, boatside, before 1959 had been followed quickly by price increases which tended to stabilize the fishery. The 1959 slump presents a different picture and, the report says, "the effectiveness of the United States shrimp industry in coping with the present situation appears to be reduced."

In 1959 the average gross return for shrimp landings in the Gulf of Mexico and in the South Atlantic areas was \$7,500 per shrimp trawler, lower than any year since 1950 when it was \$6,400. The average annual catch for 1959 was 17,300 pounds (heads-off weight) per vessel. This was considered low, although it was 1,300 pounds more than the 1958 average. In 1953 the catch per trawler averaged 23,600 pounds.

During the past 10 years the shrimp otter-trawl fleet has increased by about 1,000 craft to a fleet of 7,610 in 1959. The increase was entirely in vessels of five tons net or over; the number of smaller craft of less than five net tons declined. More than 80 percent of the catch was taken by vessels of five net tons and over.

Employment in 1959 was estimated to have been slightly higher than in 1958 when it was 17,153, about 2,000 higher than in 1957. Comparable data for other years are not available.

In 1959 imports were at a record high of 106,555,000 pounds, an increase of 25 percent over the 1958 imports. The 1958 imports were 23 percent higher than those of 1957. In 1939 shrimp imports were four million pounds; in 1950 imports exceeded 40 million pounds and in 1955 shrimp imports approximated 54 million pounds.

Since 1948 the world production of shrimp, exclusive of mainland China, has increased nearly 80 percent, to reach an estimated 632 million pounds, heads-off weight. In 1950, 18 countries exported 40 million pounds of shrimp to the United States. Mexico supplied 99 percent of that. In 1959 there were 51 nations sending more than 106 million pounds of shrimp to the United States. Mexico led with 69 million pounds which represented 64 percent of the total.

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