

News Round-up

Foul goal

Imagine a massive 120-yard long American football field-not on your TV screens but swallowed up inside a trawl net. LFS Trawl, fishing gear manufacturer in the US, has introduced a midwater trawl called the Reuben's Glove.

The net features a mouth opening which measures 60 by 30 fathoms. The lighter yet stronger material used to make the net allows vessels with less horsepower to tow it. The nets come in a wide range of sizes, from around 800 hp to 3,500 hp and are sold mainly in the markets of the US and Canada.

Oyster booster

And now, a new market for oysters. The Donlar Company has

developed the world's first fertilizer-enhancer from polyaspartic acid, a polymer found in oyster shells. This product is said to help plant roots absorb nutrients from soil and boost crop yields. It is also claimed to bind phosphorus and

nitrogen, lowering non-point source run-off of these nutrients.

Pearl jam

Not all oysters are in great demand, though. **Japan's** Fisheries Agency has called for a voluntary limit on imports of pearl oysters from China, until the source and cause of widespread deaths among cultivated pearl oysters in five prefectures is better understood.

Coral film

This is the International Year of the Reef. And to commemorate it, the Smithsonian Institution of the US premiered an environmental documentary film, *The Fragile Ring of Life*. The film is part of an effort to raise public awareness about environmental concerns relating to coral reefs.

Shrimp talks

Thailand and the European Union (EU) have been holding talks on the potential for Thailand remaining eligible for low EU tariffs under the Generalized System of Preferences, if Thailand promotes environmentally friendly shrimp farming.

Present tariff concessions for Thai shrimp exported to the EU are scheduled to be halved in July 1997, and

full benefits will be withdrawn in two years.

Safer vessels

Eight East Asian nations have agreed to require that all 24- to 45-m long fishing vessels be equipped with emergency signal and radio communication equipment, pumps, life vests, and life rafts.

The move was in preparation for eventually becoming

parties to the 1977 and 1993 international conventions on maritime safety. China, Japan, Thailand, Hong kong, **Indonesia**, **Malaysia**, the Philippines and **South Korea** adopted these moderate guidelines to reduce loss of life from fishing vessel accidents.

Oil spill

Lost at sea early this year were an estimated 26,000 barrels (3,700 tonnes) of heavy oil, when the Russian oil tanker *Nakhodka* ruptured and split apart in storms in the Sea of **Japan**, about 90 miles off the north coast of Japan. The spill was estimated to be 962,000 gallons. More than 100,000 barrels of oil

remain in unruptured tanks.

The potential impact on fisheries and aquaculture is not definitely determined. The oil first came ashore along 60 miles of coast from Kyoto Prefecture to Fukui Prefecture and then extended along 450 km of the coast, ultimately affecting 900 km of the coast. Abalone, turbine shell, shrimp, crab and seaweed fisheries were reported to be most affected by the spill.

The vessel's US\$500 million insurance coverage is expected to compensate for damages. Six prefecture governments jointly called on the central government to designate the oil spill as a disaster rather than a maritime accident. Representatives from the National Federation of Fisheries Co-operative Associations and eight regional fisheries

associations called for thorough measures to compensate fishermen for damages from the spilled oil.

Yamaquaculture

Also in **Japan**, the Yamaha Motor Co. has announced that it will begin selling feed, imported from the Dutch producer NUTRECO International B.V., to Japanese

aquaculture operators from April 1997. Also around the same time, Yamaha will establish a company with NUTRECO to conduct research and development of marine fishery products.

Shuffling fleet

Next month will be crucial for the EU as the EU's Fisheries Council decides on the new fleet restructuring phase. Late last December, the Fisheries Council had agreed to measures easing 1997 catch quota reductions.

The quota for North Sea sole was not halved to 12,000 tonnes, but reduced to 18,000 tonnes. **Italy** and **Greece** succeeded in defeating moves for quotas on tuna in the Mediterranean.

Give and take

Negotiators in Japan and **Russia** successfully concluded an agreement for a quota this year of 100,000 tonnes from each other's EEZ, the same as the 1996 quotas. Furthermore, Japan will pay 400 million yen for an additional 9,000-tonne harvest, and fishing vessels are granted specified port privileges for resupply.

Net effects from Java

It is being hailed as a technological breakthrough—the production of good quality, residue-free healthy shrimps from sandy grounds. A company in Indonesia, PT Triasta Ciatre of Jakarta, has developed a system called 'biocrete',

a mix of cement, sand and palm fibres which is poured on to a bamboo framework used to reinforce the walls or dykes inside 2,700-sq m excavated ponds, the bases of which are covered with a protective plastic sheeting.

Unlike conventional ponds built with clay-based soils, whose high salt content and build-up of pathogens

force their abandonment in about four years, biocrete shrimp ponds are claimed to be usable year after year. The bottom plastic sheet also prevents sea water from polluting the underlying soils.

The company claims that using sandy soils ensures that the shrimp live in a clean environment throughout the production cycle. It may well signify the end of the usual 'hit and run' method of shrimp farming.

The system is also being touted as environmentally sound, as no longer will Indonesia's rapidly disappearing mangrove swamps have to be cleared to make way for aquafarms.

No-go groves

Mangrove protection got a shot in the arm

from a meet held in Leticia, Columbia last December. Participants met at the inter-sessional International Panel on Forests Meeting of Indigenous and other Forest-dependent Peoples on the Management, Conservation and Sustainable Development of all Types of Forests. 43 NGOs from all over the world were represented at the meeting.

They Adopted a resolution which noted that the gravest threat to mangrove forests is the expansion of industrial shrimp farming operations. It urged governments to take immediate action to halt the expansion of such shrimp farms.

MSC: Let me see

No such common ground was observed at a workshop in Vancouver, **Canada** held in January to discuss the plan of the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) to introduce ecolabelling of seafood products. Fishing industry representatives expressed great reservation and mistrust of the MSC's process for evolving ecolabels.

However, the fact that the industry participants at the workshop sat through it and asked pointed questions meant that the industry is taking the MSC initiative seriously.

SOS: depth plight

Miskito Indian lobster divers off the coast of

Honduras and **Nicaragua** are in danger of paralytic decompression disease, which affects almost 30 per cent of the young men and boys in the coastal villages.

These divers burn 10 or 12 tanks of oxygen each day, weeks on end, at depths exceeding 100 ft in search of the dwindling supply of lobster. Experts are baffled by how these divers survive this type of diving. As many as a third of them end up permanently crippled or dead.

SOS (Sub Ocean Safety), a small group working to help these divers, has set up recompression chambers in remote locations in both Honduras and Nicaragua.

"The worldwide plague of decompression disease is a sore boil on fragile fourth world societies," says Bob Izdepski, president of

SOS. "No environmental programme will mean a thing to these coastal peoples until some of the pressure is relieved at the root".

SOS desperately needs aid in terms of donations (money or J-valves for their scuba gear). They can be contacted at Sub Ocean Safety, po Box 834, Lacombe, LA 70445.