Chronological: Statements, 1963: Statement of Daniel K. Inouye re: S.627

COPY

STATEMENT OF SENATOR DANIEL K. INOUYE
RE S. 627

May 2, 1963

The oceanic skipjack (Katsuwonus pelamis), or "aku" as it is known in Hawaii, is the most important commercial fish found in the islands and is the only tuna from Hawaii's waters that is processed in the Honolulu cannery.

When Hawaii was attacked on December 7, 1941 the skipjack fishing fleet consisted of 26 vessels manned by 300 men. Commercial fishing was immediately suspended and the larger vessels were requisitioned by the government to serve in the naval inshore patrol.

At the termination of World War II commercial skipjack fishing was re-established as soon as the vessels were reconverted or replaced by new construction, and the cannery restored its packing lines for operation.

The postwar skipjack fleet numbered 31 vessels at a valuation of $1,750,000 and employed approximately 375 fishermen. Tuna landed from these vessels has totaled as high as 14 million pounds in a year, valued in excess of $1,800,000. Today the active fleet numbers 19 and employs 170 fishermen. The value of the catch did not reach

$1,000,000 in 1960. This decline is due to two factors: lack of fishermen and lack of bait.

Beginning in 1955, attractive employment ashore in the expanding construction industry, in Honolulu and the South Pacific islands on private and government projects, made great inroads on the number of skilled fishermen. It was learned that a fisherman's skills were assets in the construction trades.

The bait problem is even more serious. Our fishermen depend solely on the live bait - pole method of catching aku. The supply of natural bait is slowly disappearing. The State has tried to introduce new species of bait fish and is currently constructing a "bait farm". Nevertheless, the supply of bait limits the catch. Since the price of fish remains steady, reduced catch means reduced income and this forces more of the fishermen into other trades.

We badly need a more efficient way to catch aku so that fishermen can catch more fish and make more money.

The success achieved by the Southern California clippers (vessels of much greater tonnage and range than the island sampans) in turning to a method of netting fish, called purse seining, leads the local industry to believe that the traditional live bait - pole method now used in local waters can be broadened by some use of nets. We do not intend to use the purse seine method now being used off Central

America, as the sampan hull type vessel of the local fleet is not suited to carry the gear of the clipper type vessel. Apparently, too, the seas and tuna behavior in the Central Pacific differ radically from the successful purse seine operation of the Southern California clippers.

Underwater observations on the Fish and Wildlife vessel "Charles H. Gilbert" show only a small percentage of the aku school is caught by the present fishing method. Some manner of netting has to be developed to quickly catch the major portion of the school as these schools in our island waters tend to move away after an average of fifteen minutes of contact.

There are certain features in gill netting that appear to make this method the likeliest approach to the problem; however, modification in design, application and handling are necessary. In other words an entirely new technique in catching the fish has to be devised. There is a strong possibility that the ultimate efficient method would combine live bait chumming, gill netting, and some features of purse seining.

We think we could accomplish this objective over a four months period of experimentation with the expenditure of Federal funds together with matching State grants. Officials of the commercial fishery, the Honolulu office of the U.S. Bureau of Commercial Fisheries, and

the Hawaii State Fish and Game Division are in fundamental agreement on the necessity for such experimentation.

I mention the foregoing project as one of many which could either be initiated or continued with the availability of Federal funds as envisaged under S. 627. The Saltonstall-Kennedy funds have proven insufficient for the type of long-range research and study so crucial to the Hawaiian fishing industry. I am sure that this has held true for many of the other states engaged in the fishing industry.

Although I do have certain reservations with regard to the emphasis upon using the average value of fish landed and/or processed within a state for assessing the proportionate need for this assistance, and have other reservations with regard to the maximum and minimum percentage of the funds to be guaranteed states, I respectfully urge serious consideration be given S. 627.