

An Analysis of the Political Economy of Japanese Fisheries:

The Dynamics of Bureaucratic Policymaking in Domestic and International Fisheries

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The management of fisheries is one of the most difficult issues facing natural resource management worldwide. Taking into consideration this scientific uncertainty and the political influence of the fishing industry, this dissertation analyzes the dynamics of fisheries policymaking in Japan, one of the largest consuming countries of fishery resources.

During the period of development until the 1970s, the Fishery Agency of Japan (FAJ) played an integral and important role by supporting the fisheries industry through its drafting of various pieces of legislation under decades of Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) rule.

The triangular relationship among FAJ bureaucrats, LDP legislators, and the fishing industry has been institutionalized. LDP legislators have exercised their influence over bureaucrats by demanding adherence to institutional requirements and through the promotion and provision of after-retirement positions. On the other hand, the fishing industry tries to maximize their political influence through their sponsorship of organizations, such as Fishery Cooperative Associations (FCA) and Public Interest Corporations (PIC). In this situation, bureaucrat utility in policymaking can be modeled through

two factors, the general welfare of the state and special interests of a particular industry. The policy-making mechanism varies according to two types of bureaucrats (i.e. administrative officials and technical officials) and the three levels of policymaking (i.e. Bureau, Ministry, and Government).

Using a policymaking model, this dissertation examines the cases of domestic and international fisheries policy in Japan. First, the policymaking regarding the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) system shows why overfishing can not be prevented under the current Japanese fishery laws. Under the existing system, scientific advice for the setting of TACs is often neglected because both administrative and technical officials have incentives to set higher TACs than are biologically sustainable. Second, in international policymaking, exemplified by the International Convention for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas, FAJ bureaucrats also try to maximize their utility by regulating illegal fishing by other countries and setting high quotas with the political support of FCAs and PICs.

In conclusion, the existing policymaking mechanism in Japan could not prevent overfishing without the incorporation of sound science and greater transparency in its policymaking. The intimate relationship between the government and interest groups makes it difficult for bureaucrats to implement policy reforms that can lead to a sustainable utilization of the global commons.

* The opinions in this dissertation are those of the author and in no way reflect the opinions or actions of the organizations for which the author works.

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