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ANNUAL MEETING - JUNE 1965Danish proposal concerning prohibition of trawl fishery on Store Hellefiske Bank (Greenland)

The highest Greenland parliamentary body, the Provincial Council (Landsrådet), has in its session August 1964 stated as follows:

"Landsrådet has with the greatest regret taken note of the continued decrease in the yield of the Greenland inshore fisheries and is consequently looking forward with the highest interest to the Greenlandic bank fishery as proposed by the Commission of 1960 on economic development in Greenland. In this connection Landsrådet is with the greatest concern noting the statement of the scientists on the trend towards overfishing in the Davis Strait.

"Landsrådet has especially noted that Store Hellefiske Bank where a large foreign trawl fishery occurs in September and October to an essential extent is inhabited by small, young and still immature cod. With the fishing method in use it is highly to be feared that decisive inroads in the cod stock occur with detrimental effects on its maintenance. In this connection it is to be remembered that according to the findings of the experts the Greenland cod population has become through the years an independent stock the survival and conservation of which to a high degree is a case of international interest.

"Therefore the Landsråd, in continuation of earlier statements based on its considerations of the problem of a special position for foreign fishery, finds it adequate to stress the necessity for the introduction of an international agreement on a prohibition of trawl fishery on Store Hellefiske Bank."

From Danish quarters it is understood that the statements of the Landsråd on overfishing are in agreement with the results arrived at by the biologists from several countries, including those of the Greenland Fisheries Investigations, independently of one another as well as in co-operation within ICNAF, viz. that the cod and redfish at Greenland now is so intensively fished that the optimum economical yield hardly is gained. Although an increased activity at the present time hardly would cause a detrimental overfishing, as the total yield will vary with year-class strength, it appears that no increase in the total yield can result from an increased fishing effort. With increased effort the yield per unit of effort will decrease, with the result that the overfishing will imperil the economic results of the fisheries.

In addition to reference to Commissioner Doc. No. 12 (Review of Possible Conservation Actions for the ICNAF Area), attention is drawn to the fact that the Greenland Fisheries Investigations has confirmed that stock-analyses of material, collected over a longer series of years from fishing banks in the Davis Strait, have shown that young, small cod generally account for a considerably larger part of the catches from Store Hellefiske Bank than is the case for any of the more southern banks. From Store Hellefiske Bank this stock of small, young cod spread - during their further growth - to the southern banks.

There is every reason to assume that of the possible conservation measures especially the protection of the stock of small cod on Store Hellefiske Bank will provide benefits to the fishery, because large quantities of small cod of only slight market-value will escape capture, to be saved for capture only when they as large, mature cod arrive on the more southern banks.

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From Danish quarters it is estimated that the present trawl fishery on Store Hellefiske Bank amounts annually to about 30-70,000 tons of cod. The numbers of smaller, less valuable cod taken by this fishery are thus very high, and the benefits to other cod fisheries in Greenland waters will be correspondingly large.

Based on the aforesaid observations and conclusions Denmark asks ICNAF to consider the recommendation of the introduction of total prohibition of fishery with any kind of trawls in the ICNAF Division 1B (Store Hellefiske Bank).

The introduction of this conservation measure will for the area in question bring on the advantage of a regional separation between long line and trawl fisheries and thus the avoidance of the damage caused to the line fisheries by the activities of trawlers.

(signed) Paul Hansen

(received in ICNAF Secretariat 21 May 1965)