



Serial No. 3672
(A.c.4)

ICNAF Comm. Doc. 75/IX/40¹

SEVENTH SPECIAL COMMISSION MEETING - SEPTEMBER 1975

Elaboration of Canadian proposal for reduction in fishing effort
on groundfish stocks in Subareas 2, 3, and 4 in 1976

Continuing declines in groundfish catches off the Canadian Atlantic coast in recent years casts doubt on the effectiveness of the present ICNAF quota regulation scheme. TACs have been set at unrealistically high levels and rarely achieved; TACs were attained in only three of the 30 groundfish stocks in Subareas 2, 3, and 4 for which quotas were set in 1974. Thus, TACs have not been an effective restrictive measure and groundfish catches (even including the recently developed silver hake fishery) declined by 28% between 1968 and 1974. They are continuing to decline as indicated by agreed TACs for 1975 and 1976. It is clear, therefore, that the setting of TACs has not, by itself, been restrictive enough to be a strong factor in maintenance of the stocks.

The present system too fails to cope with the by-catch problem. Some catches directed toward one species take very large incidental catches of other species (e.g. cod by catches of flatfish in cod fisheries on the Grand Banks). These by-catches, frequently discarded and not reported, often represent an important fraction of the total removal from the stocks. In some cases, such by-catches may be equally or more damaging to the stocks than catches in directed fisheries.

It is evident, therefore, that the present ICNAF management scheme in Subareas 2, 3, and 4 is now inadequate and that supplementary measures are necessary to assure conservation of groundfish stocks.

In addition to the present quota system, substantial reductions in fishing mortality are required to reverse the present disastrous declines. In Canada's view, the most effective way to achieve such reductions in fishing mortality is direct control of fishing effort.

At the 1975 Annual Meeting of the Commission, Canada proposed in 1976 an approximate 40% reduction below 1973 levels of groundfish fishing effort by nations other than the coastal states. For a number of stocks for which adequate data were available (comprising about 60% of the total groundfish biomass), STANES concluded that a 40% overall reduction in groundfish fishing mortality below 1973 levels, though causing a short term decline in catch, would soon permit a rebuilding of stock to the point where sustainable yields only 10% to 20% below those possible under the present regime would be achieved. Yields from certain depressed stocks would be higher than present levels, even with only 60% of present effort. Sustainable catches only slightly less or, in some cases, of the same order of magnitude can be achieved in the future, to the economic benefit of the entire fishery.

Advantages would include:

- (a) catch per unit effort would increase when effort is reduced and the landing costs;
- (b) the fish caught would be larger, the fishery more profitable, and the value of the final product;
- (c) the presence of more year-classes would improve the stability of the fishery;
- (d) the presence of more year-classes would improve the sustainability of catches; and
- (e) the presence of more older fish would increase the spawning potential and reduce the probability of poor recruitment due to overfishing of young fish.

It is also believed that effort reductions could contribute to the solution of the by-catch problem. It is further believed that effort administration could be more effective than the international inspection scheme than quota control. It is the Canadian opinion that the proposed 40% reduction in fishing effort in 1976 may be insufficient to rebuild the stocks of fishery species. A further effort reduction would need to be kept in mind. A careful review and a further reduction may be necessary in subsequent years.

It was Canada's original intent that the effort reductions take the form of decreases by each country of the number of fishing days or fish traps (or, in some cases, groups of divisions) to their respective total of a series of years and that a special regime be necessary if ICNAF is to encompass the fishery species which are not currently included. Agreed figures for fishing effort by vessels or various areas for each year would be required.

¹ All ICNAF documents will now be numbered by volume (of which this is volume 10) of the meeting at which they were presented.

To reduce the problem of implementing the effort reduction by reducing its complexity, it is now proposed that effort be reduced in each of the five groups of Divisions:

Subarea 2 and Division 3K
Division 3M
Divisions 3LNO
Division 3P
Divisions 4VWX.

To facilitate the discussion and implementation of the effort reduction program, a further Commissioners' Document will be submitted shortly, which will include tables showing for each of the above groups of areas the days fished in recent years by each country with vessels categorized by tonnage and gear. At the same time, some further details of the proposal will be put forward.

It is the Canadian view that the present debilitated state of the groundfish stocks and fishery, together with the certainty of further worsening of the situation if effective measures are not taken, make it imperative that this proposal be seriously considered and implemented without modifications which would reduce its effectiveness.