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Memorandum by the French Delegation on french fishing activities
in recent years in ICNAF subarea 2, 3 and 4

In ICNAF Com. Doc. 75/8, Canada proposes a substantial reduction in fishing effort on groundfish in Subarea 2, 3 and 4 by all countries, except coastal states. Such a reduction could be of about 40 % below the 1973 level for each gear and size category of vessels, in each division or, in some cases, groups of divisions. More recently, in Comm.doc.75/IX/40, Canada proposes to apply the reduction only in subarea 2 and division 3K and in divisions 3 M, 3 L N O, 3 P and 4 V W X.

The purpose of that document is not to discuss the background information provided by Canada in ICNAF Res. Doc. 75/43 and 75/55 nor to discuss comments given by STACRES through its assessments subcommittee in Summ. Doc. 75/18.

It is only intended to give some relevant information on the present situation of the French fishing activities in subarea 2, 3 and 4 following the increase of the overall international fishing effort in the north-west Atlantic.

CHANGES IN THE FRENCH COD CATCH

In 1960 the total French catch in the north-west Atlantic was in the order of 150.000 tons, 10.000 tons being landed in Saint-Pierre et Miquelon, the rest in Pecamp, Saint-Malo, La Rochelle or Bordeaux, the french fishing being mainly directed at cod.

During the period 1958-1969, 25 to 32 trawlers were catching more than 100.000 t of cod on the average in sbbareas 2, 3 and 4, while, in the following period, the average catch was only of 42.000 tons, The last figures for 1974 were 31.000 tons and 21 trawlers, most of them delivering frozen products instead of salted cod as in the former period.

Up to 1960, the cod fishery was equally distributed in subareas 2, 3 and 4, following the natural pattern of fish seasonnal abundance, 35.000 to 40.000 tons of cod being taken in each subarea. Between 1961-1967 larger catches were made in subarea 3 but, after 1968, the catch dropped down except in S-A 4 (fig. 1).

¹ All ICNAF documents will now be numbered to include the month (in Roman numerals) of the meeting at which they were presented.

In Saint-Pierre et Miquelon, the total ground fish catch, made mainly in divisions 3 LNOP declined from 9.000 to 3.000 tons, mostly after 1967 (fig. 2).

Thus, compared to the total catch of cod, the french fishery remained at a relatively stable level up to 1967, though reflecting of course natural changes in recruitment to the fishery. But after that year, the sharp drop in catch is obviously connected with the expansion of the international fishery effort and the subsequent decrease in cod stock abundance (fig.3).

The most recent catch by french vessels is less than 2 % of the total cod catch by vessels of all countries in 2 - 3K and 3 LNOP while, ten years ago, the figures were respectively of 14 % and 9 % for the same area (fig. 4).

CHANGES IN CATCH PER DAY

Figure 5 clearly shows that the decline in total catch after 1968 is connected with a decreased trend in catch per day in spite of minor fluctuations due to the relative annual abundance of cod.

In subareas 2, 3 and 4 the average catch per day was generally above 30 tons before 1965, around 25 tons up to 1971 and since that time, 20 tons/day. These changes can be correlated with the total increase in catch in subarea 3, especially during the period 1964-1970, when the total catch was above the 1 million tons level as shown in figure 3.

This decline is more apparent in subarea 3, starting in 1964 when total catch in that subarea has reached 500.000 tons. It was slightly less marked in subarea 2 where the influence of the early 1960's strong year-classes contributed to support the fishery until 1969, with maximum catches of 450.000. The severe ice-condition prevailing there after off the Labrador coast have also contributed, in recent years, to the reduction of the fishing activities. In subarea 4, where total catch remains at a more stable level during the whole period (220.000 tons), catch per day was more constant (\pm 30 tons) in spite of a decrease in 1973.

If catch per day is of biological interest as an index of fish availability, it is also an economical index, rentability in fishing operations being based upon a minimum out put from the fishery.

Below that level, boats have to find more productive fishing grounds and adapt their strategy to be at the best fishing period on each ground through the all north atlantic. But resulting increased cost have cooled the building of new ships in last years.

DECLINE IN EFFORT

The cumulative effect of declining total catch and catch per day which resulted in a reduction of investments in new boats explains the general diminution of the french fishing effort in the north-west Atlantic, in spite of a limited and occasional transfer of effort in subarea 3 between 1965-1969 and a small positive recovery in subarea 4 recently (fig.6).

Taking 1960 as a reference with a 100 % fishing effort index, as illustrated in Summ. Doc. 75/18, the total international effort has more than doubled whereas, in the same period, the french one has gone down to 40 % (fig. 7).

In Saint-Pierre et Miquelon 4 trawlers are in operation but dories have difficulties to maintain their activity, the total catch of that traditional fishery having fallen from 3.000 to 1.000 tons annually since 1959. For the trawlers the decline is 7.500 to 4.500 tons with an average catch per day in the order of 7 tons.

These last figures are in agreement with the general trend observed in the french fishing situation and we can assume that the over-all fishing effort has diminished from 60 % since 1968.

GENERAL COMMENTS

French data indicate that during the 1961-1974 period, in spite of a transient recovery in 1966-1968, the french total effort exerted on cod stocks in ICNAF subareas 2, 3 and 4 has gone down by 60 % with total catch decreasing from 120.000 to 30.000 tons.

If the decline in catches is explained by a marked reduction in catch per unit of effort resulting from the doubled effort of a growing international fleet since the beginning of the 1960's, reduction in effort is explained by technical and economic factors induced by these changes.

The french fleet, traditionally fishing for cod, was not prepared to move to other species, in spite of a progressive change from salted to frozen fish. If more efficient, new boats are more expensive and consequently more influenced in their fishing pattern by daily catch rate on the various cod stocks of the all north Atlantic, by example by good catch in the Barents sea in recent years. Rebuilding of the fleet has been reduced by resulting economic difficulties and is now practically stopped.

The facts described in this memorandum clearly show not only that France has no responsibility in the present situation but also that her fleet which has been fishing in the area following a long established tradition, has already suffered a considerable reduction of his fishing effort due to economical difficulties resulting from a corresponding increase of the total international effort.

—●— 2
—○— 3
—+— 4

.000 tons

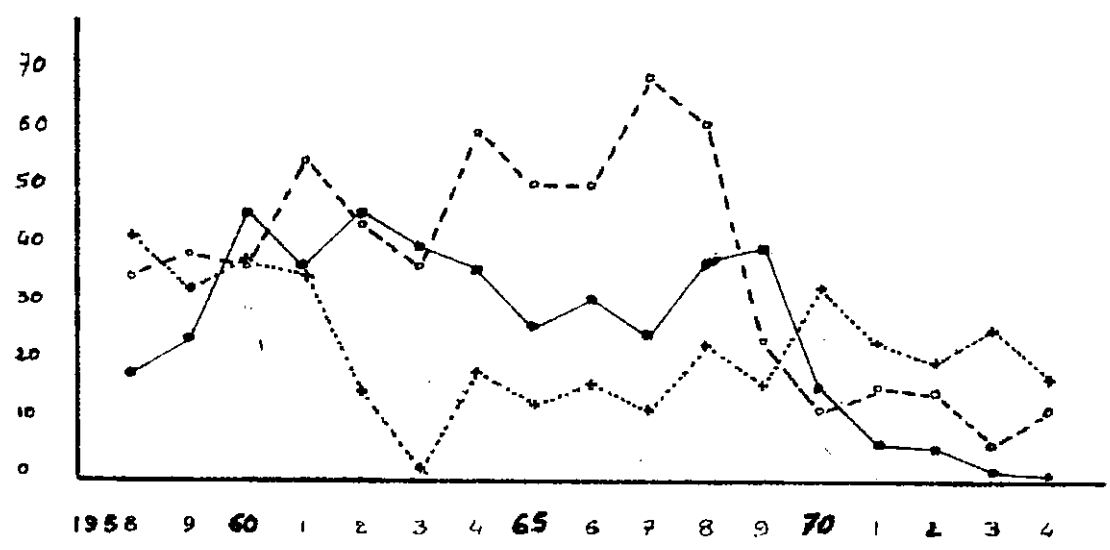


Fig. 1. Changes in cod catches, by France, in ICNAF Subarea 2, 3 and 4.

.000 tons



Fig. 2. Total groundfish catch by Saint Pierre et Miquelon in divisions 3LNOP.

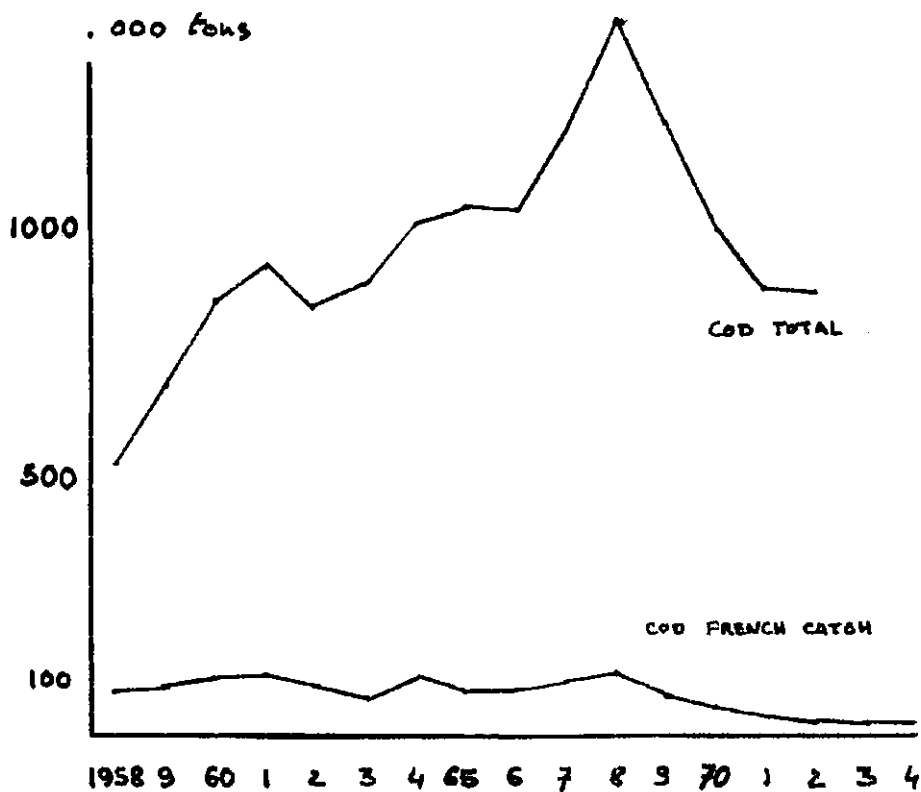


Fig. 3. French cod fishery in Subarea 2, 3 and 4 compared to the total cod catch.

— 2-3K
 - - - 3 LNOP

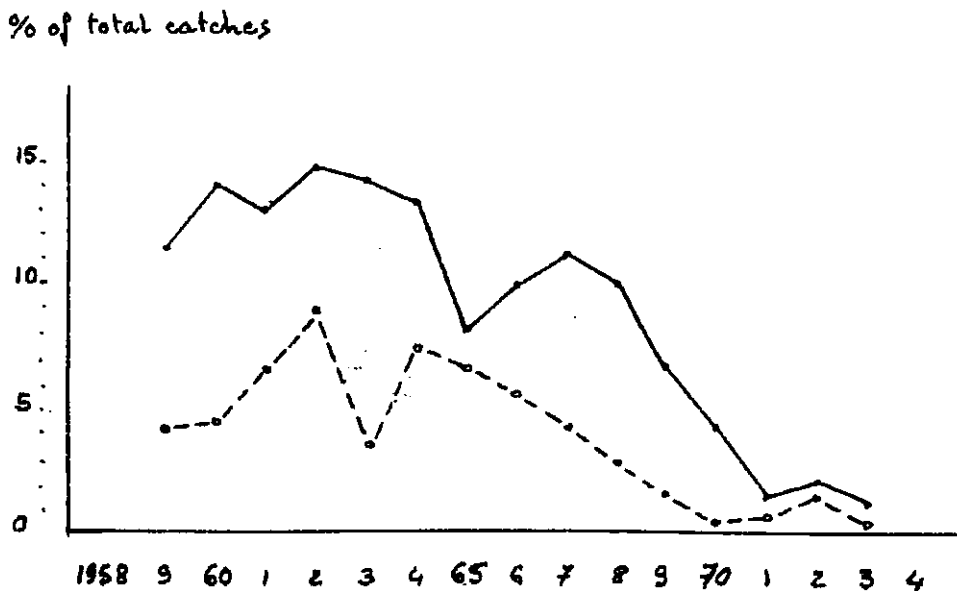


Fig. 4. French total catch as percent of total catches by all countries in ICNAF Subarea 2 and division 3K and subdivisions 3 LNOP.

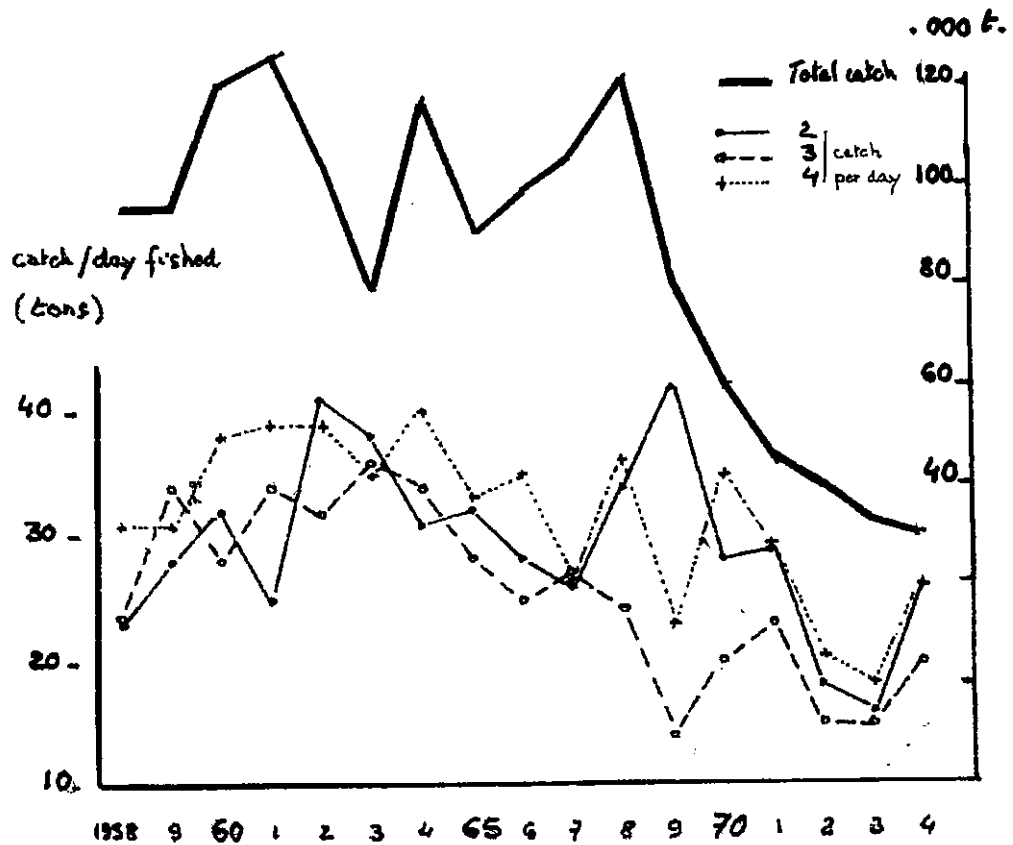


Fig. 5. Catch per day fished for french trawlers in Subarea 2, 3 and 4 compared to total catch.

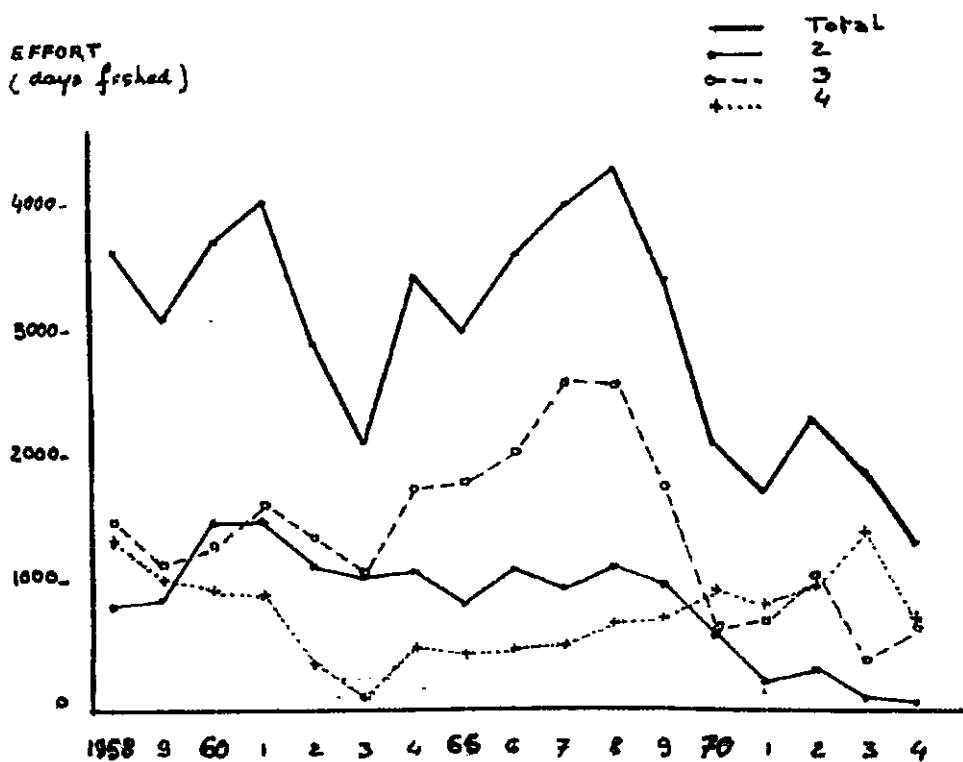


Fig. 6. Effort, in days fished, by french trawlers, in ICNAF Subarea 2, 3 and 4, and total effort.

— total effort
--- French trawlers

% change in effort

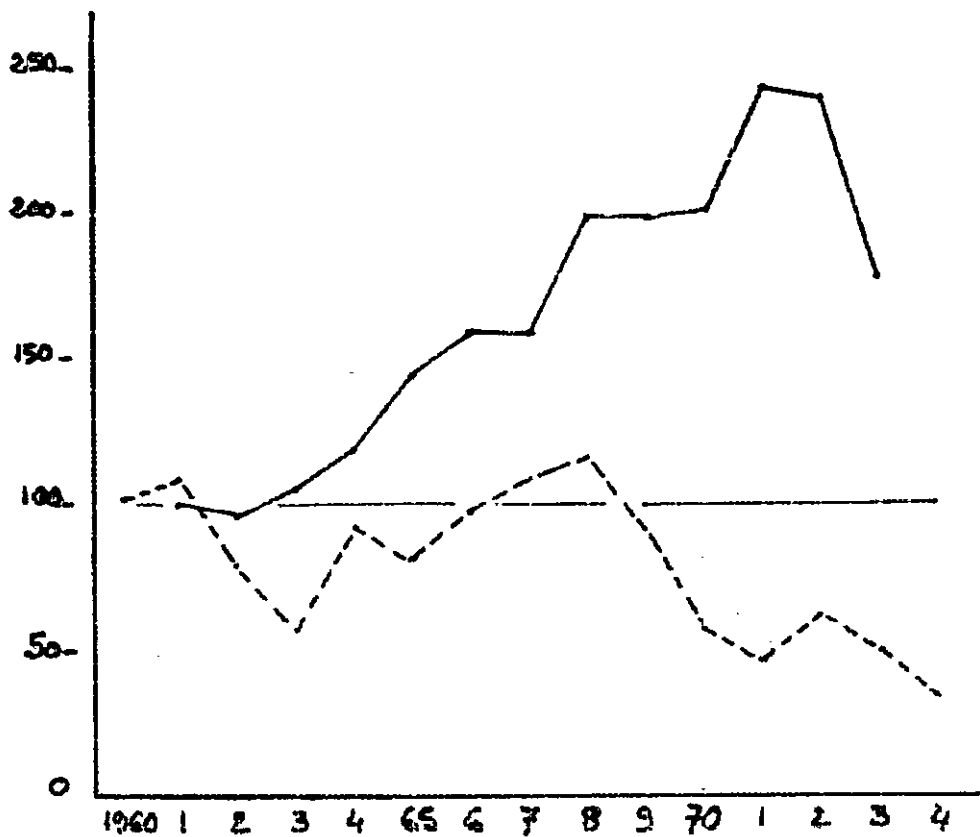


Fig. 7. Changes in effort in Subarea 2 and 3 and divisions 4VWX (total effort) and in Subarea 2, 3 and 4 for the French fleet.

