



ANNUAL MEETING - JUNE 1976

Canadian proposal regarding TACs for groundfish stocks
in Subareas 2, 3 and 4 for 1977

Canada has previously (Comm. Doc. 75/8 and 75/IX/40) expressed its concern that the present ICNAF quota regulation scheme has not prevented over-exploitation of groundfish stocks off its Atlantic Coast. In the past TAC's have been set at unrealistically high levels and even though these have not been achieved stocks have continued to decline. A 28% decrease in the catch of groundfish between 1968 and 1974, and successive reductions in the TAC that proved necessary in 1975 and 1976, demonstrate that past TAC's have not been sufficiently restrictive to provide for adequate conservation of the groundfish resource.

Canada believes the Commission must now proceed to the definition and implementation of new management objectives for all groundfish stocks. At its 25th Annual Meeting in June 1975, the Commission instructed STACRES to provide further advice on 6 stocks of groundfish for consideration at the Seventh Special Meeting in September 1975. In requesting this advice the Commission asked STACRES to "specify possible alternative objectives that might be considered by the Commission, the long-term stock sizes and catches associated with these objectives, and the TAC's required to achieve them over specified periods of time". STACRES, in its report to the Seventh Special Commission Meeting, noted that "the concept of maximum sustained catch (MSY) is difficult to define precisely and, in fact, cannot be estimated with any precision for many reasons" (ICNAF Summ. Doc. 76/1/1, page 3). STACRES considered that, "in view of the possible large adverse consequences of setting the fishing mortality rate too high, in cases where there is doubt about its adequacy, a more restrictive management system than that based on the Fmax level of fishing mortality rate would be justified". Such a management system might include:

- (i) fixing the fishing mortality rate in the exploited phase at a level somewhat lower than Fmax, and
- (ii) setting a target spawning stock size.

Scientists in other fora (e.g. the FAO Advisory Committee on Marine Resources Research and ICES) have also recently noted the inadequacy and dangers of attempting to regulate fisheries at levels which would theoretically produce the maximum sustainable yield.

Canada considers that the weight of scientific evidence now clearly indicates that the pursuit of maximum

sustainable yield (MSY) is no longer a desirable management objective from the viewpoint of maintenance of stocks, stability of fisheries and attainment of full benefits from the groundfish resources. Accordingly, Canada requests that, in preparation for the 1976 Annual Meeting, STACRES examine where possible, for groundfish stocks in subareas 2, 3 and 4 now under ICNAF quota regulation, the potential effects of a range of levels of exploitation lower than that associated with the maximum sustainable yield, which would promote greater stability of stock sizes and catches. STACRES should state the long-term implications regarding stock size, the time scale of changes, and stock constraints or any other measures that STACRES considers might assist in meeting these objectives.

Canada proposes that, at the June 1976 Annual Meeting, the Commission (i) adopt management objectives, for the groundfish stocks under ICNAF quota regulations in subareas 2, 3 and 4, other than maximum sustainable yield, and (ii) establish, for these stocks Total Allowable Catches at levels which would provide for rebuilding of the overall resource and for greater stability of stock sizes and catches. In this connection it should be noted that the $F_{0.1}$ level has already been used as a basis for the establishment of TAC's for some stocks having relatively high levels of F_{max} and might provide a convenient reference point for other stocks as well.