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Canadian proposal for the regulation of fishing gear used
in the directed silver hake fishery in ICNAF Subarea 4

Canadian surveillance through the ICNAF Joint Inspection Scheme has demonstrated that the silver hake fishery on the Scotian Shelf (ICNAF Div. 4VWX) is conducted with small mesh nets fished both on the bottom and in midwater. The codend mesh sizes used are small (40-45 mm) and it is normal practice to use codend liners, reducing potential escapement of small fish to a negligible level. Evidence from surveillance reports indicates that, particularly when fished on the bottom, this gear retains significant quantities of fish species other than silver hake. Due to the low selectivity of the gear, a large proportion of the catch, both of silver hake and other species, is of small fish.

Statistical data contained in ICNAF Statistical Bulletins substantiate direct observations of substantial by-catches of cod, redfish, flatfish, and of smaller by-catches of haddock and other species, in the directed silver hake fishery. As the size composition of these by-catches is much smaller than in the directed fisheries for these species (using regulation mesh in the cases of cod, haddock and flatfish), the fishing mortality generated on these stocks is much higher per ton of fish removed in the by-catch fishery than in the directed fishery. These small fish have not had an opportunity to realize their growth potential, hence the yield from these resources as a whole is being depressed. Thus, the silver hake fishery is having a substantial adverse effect on the yield potential of other important resources on the Scotian Shelf, causing hardship for those engaged in directed fisheries for those resources.

The silver hake catch taken in the directed silver hake fishery is composed of relatively small fish, and increases in the total yield of silver hake are likely if the size at capture is increased. Yield-per-recruit studies indicate that substantial benefits are obtained by raising the mean age at first capture to at least 18 months, equivalent to a fish length of 26 cm. Mesh selectivity studies conducted in Subarea 5 and off Northwest Spain indicate that a codend mesh size of 60-80 mm would be required to attain this size at capture.

As a first step to reducing the by-catch problems associated with the silver hake fishery and to maintaining the yield of that fishery, Canada proposes:

1. That Contracting Governments take appropriate action to prohibit persons under their jurisdiction from engaging in a directed fishery for silver hake in ICNAF Div. 4VWX using any trawl gear (i.e. otter or midwater trawl gear types) capable of being fished on the bottom, or from attaching any protective device to midwater trawl gear or employing any means which would in effect make it possible to fish on the bottom unless such trawl gear has in the codend meshes of dimensions not less than 130 mm (5-1/8 inches).
2. That Contracting Governments take appropriate action to prohibit persons under their jurisdiction from engaging in a directed fishery for silver hake in ICNAF Div. 4VWX:
 - a) using midwater trawl gear which has in any part of the net, meshes of dimensions less than 80 mm (3-1/5 inches);
 - b) using any means or device which would obstruct the meshes of the net or which would otherwise, in effect, reduce the selectivity of the net of the type described under 1 and 2(a).

April 7, 1976