



Serial No.2232
(A.a.4)

ICNAF Comm.Doc.69/20

ANNUAL MEETING - JUNE 1969

United States Proposal
Concerning Conservation Measures in Subarea 5 of the
Convention Area for Haddock and for Red Hake

Haddock Conservation

The United States is gravely concerned about the depletion of the haddock stocks on the Georges Bank fishing grounds in Subarea 5 of the Convention Area.

At the 18th Annual Meeting of ICNAF, held in London, June 4-8, 1968, the Commission received a report from its Standing Committee on Research and Statistics stating, inter alia, that stocks of haddock in Subarea 5 were demonstrably overexploited, and that data were available to set catch quotas at any desired level of fishing mortality for this stock. A more specific status report on the haddock stock in Subarea 5 was prepared by the Subcommittee on Assessments of the ICNAF Committee on Research and Statistics at a meeting held in London, January 22-25, 1969 (ICNAF Res.Doc. 69/46). A principal conclusion of the Subcommittee was that in the Georges Bank haddock fishery "the stock abundance in 1968 was, in fact, at the lowest level on record, approximately one-third of that during the 1935-63 period of stabilized fishing."

Scientists on the Subcommittee on Assessments noted that the Georges Bank haddock fishery was a reasonably stabilized one during the period 1935-63 with an average annual yield of about 50,000 metric tons. However, in the years 1965-1966, when a very strong year class appeared in the fishery, annual catches increased nearly three times due mainly to a great increase in fishing effort by distant water vessels. The total catch of haddock in Subarea 5 was 154,725 tons in 1965 and 126,978 tons in 1966. These extremely large catches rapidly reduced the abundance, and fishing intensity in the fishery in 1967 and 1968 fell to the approximate level of earlier years. Unfortunately, recruitment of young fish since 1965 has also fallen to extremely low levels. All of the haddock year classes produced on Georges Bank for 5 consecutive years from 1964 through 1968 have been extremely poor. These two factors--heavy fishing and poor spawning survival--are the reasons why abundance of the stock has fallen to one-third of its previous level.

One of the most serious aspects of the present condition is that the Georges Bank haddock stock now consists primarily of the remains of the 1963 year class, and U.S. scientists note that recruitment in 1969 is expected to be very low. During the 35 years that U.S. scientists have studied the

haddock resource, varying recruitment patterns have been observed. Never before, however, has recruitment been so extremely poor for such an extended period. In these circumstances, U.S. scientists believe that additional conservation measures are urgently needed to prevent further deterioration of this extremely valuable resource. The need for such measures has been recognized by scientists from other countries. In its analysis of the Subarea 5 haddock stock, the ICNAF Subcommittee on Assessments stated:

"Despite uncertainties about the relationship between stock and recruitment the Subcommittee considers that, in order to permit the most rapid rebuilding of the adult stock, and so give an improved chance of better recruitment, it is desirable to restrict the catch to the lowest practicable level for the next few years (i.e. at least up to 1972)."

Although the factors affecting recruitment are not entirely understood, U.S. scientists fear that, because of the high degree of vulnerability of haddock stocks to trawl gear, unrestricted fishing could possibly reduce Georges Bank haddock stocks to the point where the probability of their recovery is inordinately small.

The United States believes that the need for additional measures to protect haddock in Subarea 5 has been clearly demonstrated. The principal regulatory alternatives available to the Commission would be proposals to:

1. Prohibit all fishing for haddock in Subarea 5.
2. Prescribe an overall catch limit for haddock in Subarea 5 at a low level.^{1/}
3. Establish a closed season for haddock in Subarea 5.^{1/}
4. Prohibit the use of certain fishing gear and appliances in parts of Subarea 5.

In accordance with Articles VII and VIII of the International Convention for the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries, specific regulatory proposals for haddock in Subarea 5 must be initiated by Panel 5 of the Commission. When the 19th Annual Meeting of the Commission convenes, the scientific advisors to Panel 5 will undoubtedly have further information which will assist the Panel in its deliberations. The United States Delegation asks that the Commission give its most serious attention to developing practical regulatory proposals for the drastically depleted stocks of haddock in Subarea 5.

^{1/} A proposal for a closed season could be combined with a proposal for an overall catch quota during the period when the fishery would be open.