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Statement by the Polish delegation concerning industrial catches of fish species utilized for human consumption

Rapidly expanding industrial catches along with steadily increasing fish meal production in the recent decade have been watched with an anxiety by those countries the fishing fleets of which operate mainly for fish provided for human consumption.

As a rule no high requirements are placed on fish for industrial purposes. Both fish of small size and not necessarily fresh are utilized for fish meal production. Accordingly it is easy to organize catches for fish meal on a large scale which thus becomes fraught with danger to fish resources as compared to catches of fish for human consumption.

Fish meal production may be based on a variety of marine organisms and it is justified to use a number of them for processing into fish meal. Here we may include:

1. fish offals obtained during processing of fish for human consumption;
2. by-catch obtained from catches for human consumption;
3. fish and some other marine organisms not used for human consumption and landed from special industrial catches, such as sand eel, Norway pout, etc;
4. surplus of fish caught for human consumption when the abundance of fish resources permits to increase catches beyond the possibilities of utilization for human consumption.

Some essential objections are to be raised against industrial catches in those cases when they are in competition with catches provided for human consumption. In such cases occurs considerable loss of nourishing substances because only some portion of protein

and fat contained in fish meal is assimilated by bred animals. Simultaneously the expansion of industrial catches utilizing fish otherwise provided for human consumption depletes market supply of fish products of nourishing and dietary values, to which the customers are already used.

Uncontrolled expansion of industrial catches, if maintained, will drive those fishing fleets which operate for fish for human consumption out of their fishing grounds and this for the following reasons:

1. Industrial catches may be based on juvenile fish and an intensive exploitation of this kind leads to landing of the major part of the stock before fish recruited into it reaches the size fit for consumption and before they are ready for spawning.
2. Preservation of landed catch for fish meal is comparatively simple and does not involve high labour expenditure. Thus in this kind of fishery it is possible to use a very efficient kind of gear, landing aboard a fishing vessel large quantities of fish within a short time. That is why purse seines have been so widely used in industrial catches. The use of so highly efficient fishing gear on a large scale would result in depletion of fish stocks and bring to an end the remunerativeness of the less productive fisheries for human consumption.
3. The fisheries for industrial purposes do not show as much concern in keeping up the stock of a given fish species on a necessary level as the fisheries exploiting stocks for consumption. This comes from a greater elasticity of the former, which having overfished one species can easily shift over to start the exploitation of another one. The kind of fish exploited for fish meal is of a lesser importance than in fisheries for human consumption which has to cover the demand for some particular fish species. This demand arises from habits and preferences of consumers, established as the

result of many centuries of tradition and which can neither fast nor easily be changed.

As an illustration of how the fisheries for human consumption are forced out by industrial catches may serve the situation in herring catches, observed in NE Atlantic and recently also in mackerel catches in the North Sea.

Actually industrial catches compete with fisheries for human consumption in exploitation of a few fish stocks. In the future, however, more fish stocks may become the object of such competition and therefore our opinion is that whenever fish resources, being simultaneously exploited for fish meal and for human consumption, decrease as the result of overfishing (and it is just in these cases that the competition between these two kinds of fisheries takes place) all the fishery regulations should in the first rate aim at full and balanced filling up of the demand for fish for human consumption.

Regulations establishing either minimum mesh size or minimum fish length do somewhat automatically act in favour of fisheries for human consumption since they lead to landings of a better and higher standard fish and this prompts the fishermen to take better care of the catch in order to have it preserved and protected against spoilage and used for human consumption. It is quite another matter with a catch quota regulation. Such quota is defined in weight units and may consist of different number of fish depending on an average weight of caught individuals, but as regards the effect on fish stocks it is not without significance whether the bulk of landed fish consists of a great number of juvenile individuals caught before their first spawning or of a smaller number of larger, adult fish.

Finally, to support our above considerations we would point to the Article 2 of the Convention on Fishing and Conservation of the Living Resources of the High Seas (Geneva, 29 April, 1958): "As employed in this Convention, the expression "Conservation of the living resources at the high seas" means the aggregate of the measures rendering possible the optimum sustainable yield from

those resources so as to secure a maximum supply of food and other marine products. Conservation programmes should be formulated with a view to securing in the first place a supply of food for human consumption". Thus wherever the competition between industrial catches and catches for human consumption takes place and calls for regulatory measures, such measures should tend to reduce to minimum any possible loss of nutritious substances. Particularly when need arises for limitation catch quotas, i.e. as soon as the management of the resources is commenced on an international scale, the demand for fish for direct human consumption should be given the priority before industrial catches. When distributing the quotas for a given fish stock into consideration should be taken both the size of fish and the destination of landed catch. For the future such measures should be taken which would prevent industrial catches to force out from the fishing grounds the fleets operating for fish for human consumption.

Submitting this statement the Polish delegation proposes to take it into consideration in future regulations of fisheries in the NEAFC area.