

CANADA-KOREA FISHERIES RELATIONS (DRIFTNET FISHING)

ISSUE

The squid driftnet fishery in the North Pacific, in which Korea participates, may be damaging the ecosystem and intercepting North American salmon.

BACKGROUND

There is continuing concern in Canada over Asian driftnet operations in international waters of the North Pacific. For several years, Canadian scientists have conducted research cruises in the North Pacific to obtain data on driftnet fishing and in June 1991 Canada hosted an international meeting (in which Korea participated) which reviewed the best available scientific data on the impact of driftnet fishing. In 1989, a pilot observer program was started involving Canadian, American and Japanese observers on Japanese squid driftnet vessels. The results of the 1989 and 1990 observer program indicate that substantial numbers of mammals and birds (including several endangered species) and fish other than squid were caught in the driftnet fishery. Salmon catches were not significant, but concerns about interceptions of North America salmon remain. While estimates are imprecise, it is likely that the North Pacific squid driftnet fishery destroys 40,000 to 80,000 marine mammals, about 750,000 seabirds, large quantities of pomfret, tuna and other fish species annually.

Canada-Korea driftnet consultations were held April 25-26, 1990 in Seoul. Korea confirmed that it will not expand its driftnet fishing effort in the North Pacific beyond that of last year. The Koreans rejected the Canadian request that two Canadian scientific observers be placed on Korean commercial squid driftnet vessels. A Korean offer to accept a Canadian observer on board a Korean simulating driftnet vessel was not pursued by Canada given its limited benefits. The Korean side did not respond positively to Canadian requests to establish salmon export/import controls in an effort to halt the international commerce in illegally harvested Pacific salmon.

A program of scientific exchanges on driftnets was worked out. Both countries agreed to exchange one scientist aboard their respective driftnet research vessels beginning in 1991. As well, information and personnel from their respective fisheries research and scientific institutes will be exchanged.