

THE FISHERIES

Many of the earliest treaties between Canada and the United States were concerned with fish. The interest remains. In this section, we report on the state of fisheries on both coasts.

The East Coast

Atlantic Coast fishermen from Canada and the U.S. take millions of tons of cod, herring, haddock and hake, and hundreds of thousands of tons of scallops and lobsters annually from the Atlantic's shallow offshore waters.

The harvests from one prized fishing ground, Georges Bank, off the Massachusetts and Nova Scotia coasts, have been a point of contention in recent years.

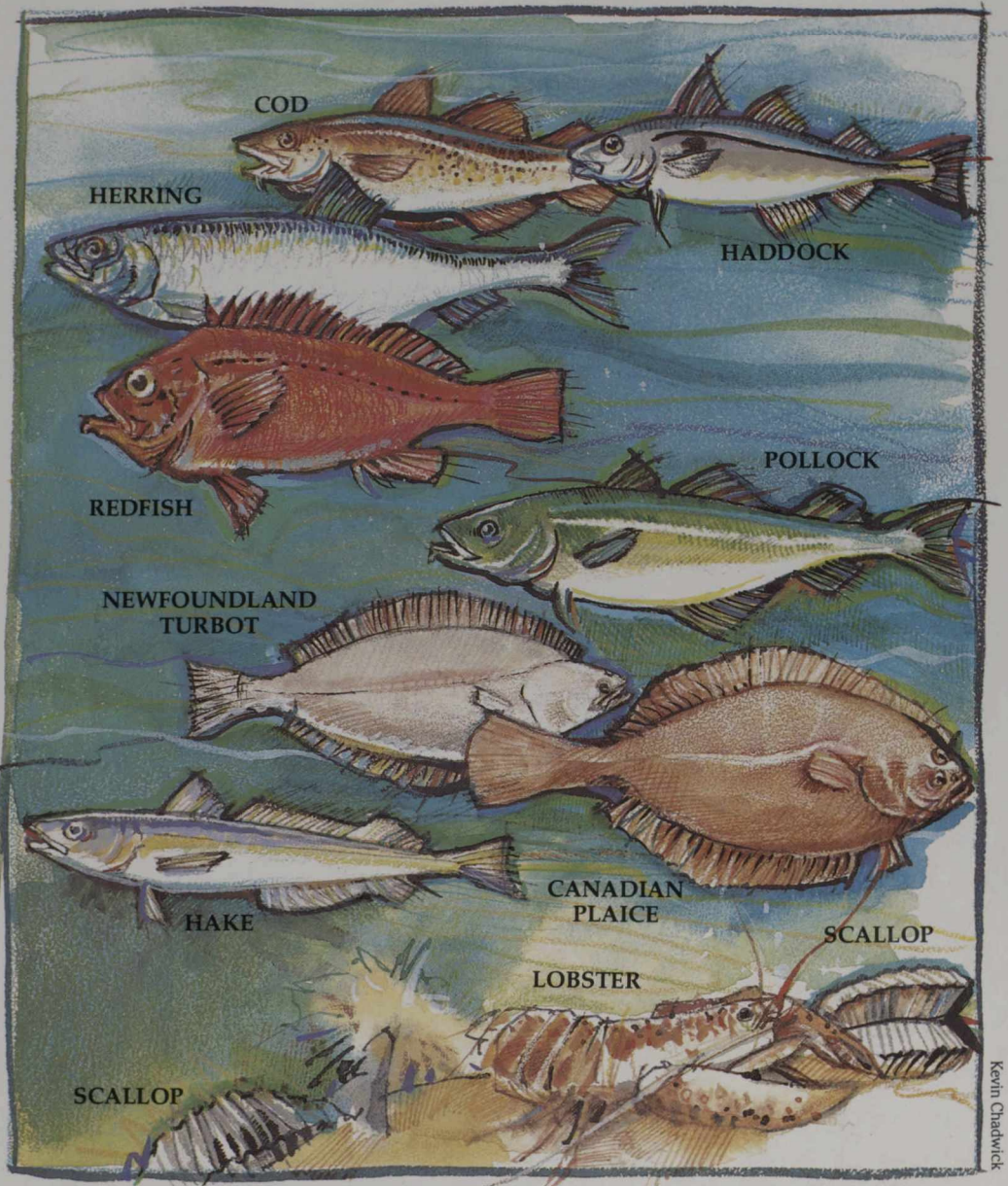
In 1977, Canada and the United States both reacted to the presence of huge factory ships from Europe and Asia in the North Atlantic by extending their economic jurisdictions to include waters within 200 miles of their coasts. Since the Massachusetts and Nova Scotia coasts are highly irregular, the claimed jurisdictions overlapped.

Preliminary negotiations went smoothly. It was agreed that each country would manage the fish within its own waters and regulate its own vessels in disputed waters. Management of the fish in disputed waters would be negotiated.

In 1977, the two countries began discussing a division of the fish harvests. At the heart of the problem was the scallop catch on Georges Bank. Canadian fishermen had in recent years taken 85.6 percent of the catch. In 1979 the negotiators agreed to allot the Canadians 73.35 percent of the scallop catch and the Americans 83 percent of the cod taken in the disputed area, 90 percent of the silver hake, 90 percent of the red hake, 79 percent of the haddock and 66 percent of the herring.

They also agreed to let the International Court of Justice in The Hague fix the boundary and to allow each country access in perpetuity to the other's waters, regardless of where the boundary was drawn.

The treaty, signed in March 1979, met strong and effective resistance from the U.S. fishing industry and the senators from Massachusetts and Rhode Island, and by 1981 the Reagan Administration decided it would be futile to submit it to the Senate. Both the division of the fish harvest and the boundary question were submitted to the International Court of Justice. Both sides presented extensive arguments and in 1984 the Court ruled, allotting five-sixths of the Bank to the United States, but giving Canada the richer fishing grounds.



S.S.C. Photo Centre, Bryce Flynn