

NORTHWEST ATLANTIC FISHERY

BACKGROUND

Canada and the Fishery

The Canadian government is committed to a sound conservation policy for the Northwest Atlantic fishery. At stake is one of the world's most important fishing zones, the famous Grand Banks. International respect for scientific management decisions is critical to the survival of the fishery and the people who depend upon it.

Canada's commitment to conservation is implemented through the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO), the international body formed to manage the fishery in the Northwest Atlantic outside Canada's 200-mile fishing zone. NAFO establishes limits on total fish catches in accordance with a scientific management system which has been in place for more than a decade. The 12 member countries of NAFO are Bulgaria, Canada, Cuba, Denmark on behalf of the Faeroe Islands and Greenland, the European Economic Community (EC), the German Democratic Republic, Iceland, Japan, Norway, Poland, Romania and the Soviet Union.

The European Economic Community and the Fishery

Since its establishment, NAFO has adopted consistent conservation measures through consensus decisions which included the EC. These actions were successful in rebuilding NAFO-managed stocks in waters outside the 200-mile zone until 1986.

* After Spain and Portugal joined the EC in 1986, the EC ceased cooperating within the NAFO framework. The EC has since established unilateral quotas up to 12 times the level of NAFO quotas. The overfishing which followed has now led to the depletion of some key fish stocks.

NAFO has again reduced catch limits for 1990 in response to the depleted state of fish stocks in the Northwest Atlantic. It is clear that if the EC continues its recent fishing practices, the fishery will be severely damaged to the detriment of fishermen and fishing industries in all countries.