

## A Vital History

The notebooks of John Cabot reflect a long-lost world. The Italian explorer reached the Grand Banks in 1497, where he wrote that the cod were so abundant they could be scooped up in baskets lowered over the side of his ship. The fishing that followed, from the 16th century onwards, was so vigorous and lucrative that writers labelled the area the "cod mines."

In the modern era, the Grand Banks' fishing industry peaked in the late 1960s, with massive catches by large fleets of highly efficient factory-freezer ships. These catches depleted the stocks and devastated the large international fishery that relied on the Banks' supply of fish.

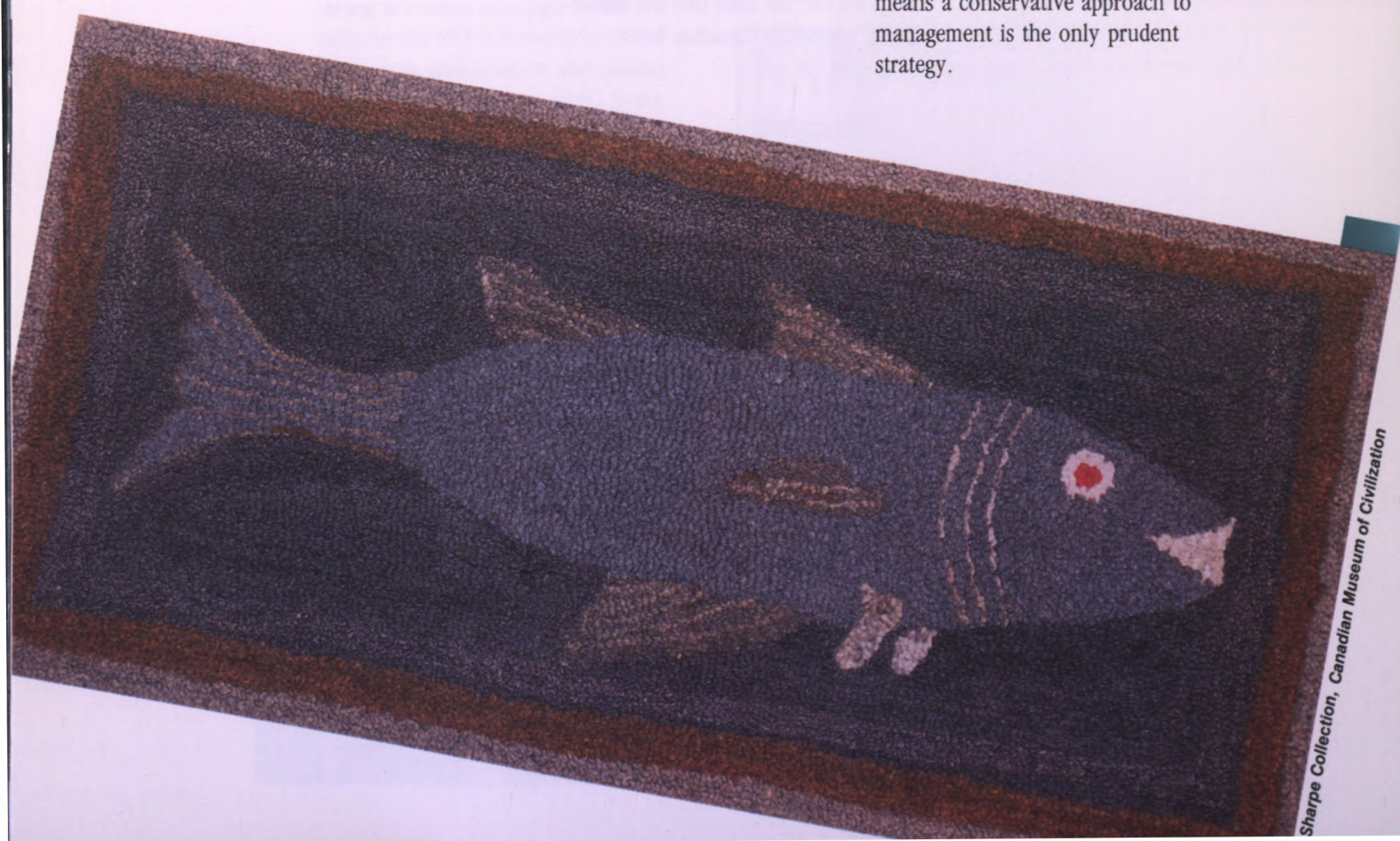
For centuries, the fishery has been central to Atlantic Canada's social and artistic life.

By the mid-1970s, the fish stocks had been reduced to a minuscule fraction of the glut of fish that John Cabot beheld. The destruction of the fishery seemed near.

*The nursery areas of valuable species are located just outside the Canadian 200-mile limit.*

A historic corner was turned in 1977. Canada, along with many other countries, declared a 200-mile fishing zone in accord with the emerging Law of the Sea Convention. Then Canada began the long process of reviving the fish stocks.

Canadian fishery managers established a strict conservation program to rebuild the stocks inside Canada's zone and enforced regulations and quota controls on Canadian fishermen. The northwest Atlantic seas are colder than the waters of Europe, so stocks grow relatively slowly. This means a conservative approach to management is the only prudent strategy.



Sharpe Collection, Canadian Museum of Civilization