

Canada looks favourably upon the development of the archipelagic waters theory that is closely related to the straits issue. This has been put forward by the states composed of many islands, such as the Philippines, Indonesia and Fiji. Even though it does not apply directly to the Arctic archipelago which is a coastal one adjoining a large land mass state, it appears to be a move in the right direction, at least insofar as economic jurisdiction is concerned. The thorny issue of transit through straits and archipelagos will doubtless cause major difficulties at the Conference.

Fisheries

In 1609 the renowned Dutch jurist, Hugo Grotius, wrote:

"Most things become exhausted with promiscuous use. This is not the case with the sea. It can be exhausted neither by fishing nor by navigation, that is to say, in the two ways in which it can be used."

This statement is no longer correct on two important counts. But for some 350 years it accurately summed up the relationship of man and the sea. Any politician must agree that being considered right for that long is a highly enviable reputation. But Grotius underestimated both mankind's energy and ingenuity. There are certainly more than the two traditional uses of the sea that he cites. Also, and very troublingly so, we know that the sea can be exhausted by the indiscriminate use of modern fisheries techniques. The last years have seen the developments of methods of fishing that resemble vacuum cleaning more than anything else. As ancient and vast as it is, the sea cannot indefinitely be abusively exploited. Like everything else in our world, it has its limits. Human technology can now fish whole species to virtual extinction.

With an expanding world population and an ever increasing demand for protein, the living resources of the sea become daily more important. Long-range "factory" fleets go to sea for months at a time, equipped with self-contained processing and freezing plants and sophisticated fish detecting equipment, hunting hundreds and even thousands of miles from their home waters. These fleets are well known in the waters off our coasts.

But the end to expansion is in sight. In the foreseeable future, all major fish stocks useful to man will be exploited to the maximum these stocks can bear, or even beyond. With unrestricted competition for these scarce resources, overfishing and consequent reductions in yields would inevitably follow. Already in some of the world's most valuable fisheries, such as herring, the declines have set in. For some species of whales, overfishing has caused such a serious depletion that fifty years will be required to assure their restoration. In this light, there is an urgent need for establishment of management regimes to tailor fishing pressure to the capacity of the resources to regenerate themselves.

It is ironic that if it had not been for the 2nd World War, these resources might have reached the depletion point even earlier. The six years that mankind devoted to the destruction of his own species gave a needed respite to the creatures of the sea and they multiplied virtually undisturbed during that time.