

Early in the conference major proposals, each differing materially from the other, were put forth by the U.S.S.R., Mexico, the U.S.A., and Canada. The Mexican and U.S.S.R. proposals were similar in that both would have permitted states to set the breadth of their territorial seas at any distance from three to 12 miles. The United States proposal had one major difference from Canada's, in that it allowed for an indefinite continuation of fishing rights in the fishing zone of coastal states by those fishing states which had traditionally fished there. As the conference progressed, first Mexico and later the U.S.S.R. withdrew their proposals in favour of an Afro-Asian "18-power proposal". This proposal, like its antecedents, was based on the three-to-twelve mile formula. It became clear that some compromise between the Canadian and the United States positions was necessary if the conference was to succeed in reaching agreement.

Canada and the United States therefore decided to withdraw their proposals in favour of a new compromise proposal, which they then presented jointly. The new proposal was essentially the same as the original Canadian one, except that it gave to coastal states claiming traditional fishing rights the right to continue to fish for a period of ten years in the fishing zones contiguous to the territorial waters of other states. It was this feature of the proposal which constituted the element of compromise between those states wishing to continue to enjoy traditional fishing rights off the coasts of other countries and the coastal states desiring to protect their living resources of the sea. The provision was also intended to render unnecessary bilateral arrangements between states designed to lessen the impact on fishing states of the sudden loss of traditional fishing rights. The proposal was, in effect, a compromise which, involving as it did sacrifices on both sides, gave promise of ensuring success of the conference.

The 18-power and the joint Canada-United States proposals were voted on in committee (where a simple majority only was required) on April 13. The 18-power proposal was rejected by a vote of 36 in favour and 39 against, with 13 abstentions, while the joint Canada-United States proposal was adopted by a vote of 43 in favour and 33 against, with 12 abstentions. Since this proposal was the only one which had succeeded in committee, it was the only proposal referred by that body to the plenary session, where a two-thirds majority was necessary. On April 26 the proposal was put to a vote. The result was 54 votes in favour and 28 against (with 5 abstentions—Lebanon not being present). The proposal failed by only one vote. A motion to reconsider the proposal also failed to receive the necessary two-thirds support, and the conference ended.