

Working toward consensus, avoiding divisive votes and accepting all parts of a treaty as a "package" without reservation -- all these features of the Law of the Sea Conference have established valuable precedents for the conduct of future international negotiations. New understandings have been formed at the Conference, between North and South, and East and West, that have built bridges and narrowed differences among nations. Community of interest has, for example, led to the formation of the coastal state group; the landlocked and geographically disadvantaged state group; the "margineers", representing broad shelf states; those great debating societies, the two maritime boundary delimitation groups; and even "the good Samaritans", the group of middle industrialized states that worked to build consensus at the last session of the Conference.

Of all the accomplishments of the Conference, one that stands out, perhaps because it has eluded the international community for decades, even centuries, is agreement on the limit for the territorial sea. More than 80 coastal states have already incorporated into their national laws the Conference consensus setting the limit at a maximum of 12 miles. The Convention establishes the rights and obligations of both coastal and flag states within the territorial sea, provisions on which parties to the Convention will be able to rely. Parties will also be able to take advantage of the new provisions on transit passage through international straits. They offer a major inducement to maritime states especially to sign and ratify the Convention.

After years of so-called "fish wars", prior to 1973, the Conference rightly recognized the need to assign to coastal states the control of all living resources within a 200-mile exclusive economic zone. To ensure an equitable distribution of such an important food resource, the Convention places a duty on coastal states to permit access to any surplus. The novel concept of the exclusive economic zone, which is neither high seas nor territorial sea, allows a coastal state to exercise sovereign rights over such things as fisheries, and mineral resources, and specific jurisdiction over marine scientific research and the prevention of marine pollution, in accordance with the Convention and in the best interests of the international community.

Beyond the Exclusive Economic Zone, the Conference recognized the primary interest and responsibility that the state of origin has in respect of salmon that spawn in its rivers. Canada joined many other coastal states in developing a provision to conserve fish stocks that