

1. BACKGROUND

Mexico has 11,593 kms. of coastlines, a continental shelf of 357,000 square kms. and 2.5 million hectares of continental waters, 13,500 square kms. of coastal lagoons and 2.5 million hectares of inland waters. Within the almost three million square kilometers within the 200 mile Exclusive Economic Zone, Mexico has a potential of over six million tons of various species, of which it has been determined that 3.67 million can be exploited without affecting their evolution. The exploitation of these resources, however, had been small, spontaneous, limited and erratic until recently. It isn't until some 25 years ago, that fishing has become an important economic activity in Mexico. Before that, a relative lack of resources, as well as an insufficient "fishing awareness" had limited the development of this activity. The development of agriculture and industry had been viewed as pillars of Mexico's economic development, while fishing had been considered neither a significant source of food or inputs, nor the motor to an industrialization process in the long run, nor a source of employment and foreign currency. It wasn't until the 1970's, that fishing was viewed differently and began to grow dynamically, generating an increasing primary production, both to cover a growing domestic demand and exports; employment; and an articulation of related activities.

The legal framework for fishing is based on the Mexican Constitution of 1917, which states that the national territory and its waters are the property of the Nation, which has the right to further transfer their dominion to individuals to constitute a private property, although under the modes imposed by the Nation. The Nation also has sovereign rights over the Exclusive Economic Zone which comprises 200 nautical miles from the coast. The first Fishing Law was passed by President Cárdenas in 1925 and it particularly favored cooperatives, for which were reserved the exploitation of certain species. This Law has constantly been revised since and led to the creation of the Secretariat of Fishing (SEPESCA) in 1982. The present fishing production regime was formed between 1925 and 1950, allowing the participation of cooperatives, private firms and independent fishermen, although the capture of abalone, sea lobster, oyster, shrimp, turtle and certain other species are still reserved for cooperatives. Between 1950 and 1970, with the growth in the volume fished, the fishing industry was organized and brought about the diversification of fishing. During the next two decades, increasing financial resources were channeled towards this sector and the number of boats grew substantially.

The volume fished has grown very rapidly in response to the legal changes. Total capture was 3,800 tons in 1922. Eight years later it amounted to 11 thousand tons and in 1940 to 71 thousand tons, of which only 20 tons were for internal consumption. During this year, a significant number of foreign boats operated in Mexico, which, although they represented only 16% of the number of operating boats, accounted for 66% of total fishing volume, which