

NAFO has 12 members, including Canada (as the coastal state), the EC, the Soviet Union, Norway, Japan and seven others. While Canada manages fisheries within 200 miles, NAFO manages the straddling stocks on the Grand Banks and the fish stocks on the Flemish Cap (which is entirely outside 200 miles). A fish stock is a discrete body of fish, one that does not mingle with other fish stocks or does so to a very limited degree. By management of a fish stock, I mean setting a total allowable catch (TAC) for the stock, assigning quotas for catches and other conservation measures.

After establishment of the 200-mile limit in 1977, Canada drastically reduced catches within its 200-mile zone to allow fish stocks to rebuild. NAFO similarly reduced catches as part of a conservationist approach, again to allow regeneration of fish stocks and to provide for a long term sustainable fishery.

No one would claim that either Canada or NAFO have been models of perfection in fisheries management. There is always a degree of uncertainty and some mistakes have been made. But until 1986, there had been a genuine and often painful commitment by all NAFO members to conservation and good resource management.

However, since 1986 and the accession of Spain and Portugal to the EC, major problems have developed in NAFO. In 1986, the EC broke with its pattern of supporting and adhering to NAFO conservation measures. Instead, it began setting its own quotas, contrary to any principles of conservation; consider the 1988 unilateral EC quotas for American Plaice on the Southern Grand Banks which was almost 18 times its NAFO quota.

This overfishing by the EC has led to major declines in fish stocks, an important example being the three flatfish stocks on the Southern Grand Banks. In 1986, the TACs set by NAFO on the basis of its collective scientific advice for these stocks totalled 75,000 tonnes. For 1990, the total of the TACs for these stocks is only 34,900 tonnes. That is a reduction of more than 50% in only four years.

Since 1986, when the EC began its practice of overfishing, it has received quotas from NAFO for 78,200 tonnes of fish. During that period, it set quotas for itself totalling 540,000 tonnes and has caught a total of 410,000 tonnes, almost seven times its NAFO quotas.

The NAFO scientific council, whose findings represent a consensus of all members including the EC, has found that NAFO-managed flatfish stocks and the Southern Grand Banks Cod show signs of serious decline. They have noted that heavy fishing of flatfish by the EC now takes place in key nursery areas.