

Fisheries Management

Issue

Overfishing by foreign vessels has been a major contributor to the collapse of Canada's fish resources. Canada's continental shelf extends beyond the 200-mile exclusive economic zone (EEZ) into areas of the continental shelf known as the Nose and Tail of the Grand Banks, and also the Flemish Cap. Canada is one of only three countries with such a continental shelf that extends beyond 200 miles. While the shelf is different in the west and north than it is off the east coast, multinational cooperation and reform is necessary to manage shared stocks in a commercially viable manner.

Background

The \$3.9 billion national fishing industry employs over 70,000 people directly and contributes over \$1.5 billion to the national trade surplus (2009 figures, DFO).

The North Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO) was established in 1979 to manage the stocks that straddled Canada's EEZ and the high seas beyond 200 miles and those on the Flemish Cap. NAFO has been ineffective in achieving conservation of internationally fished groundfish stocks. The stocks include northern cod, southern Grand Bank cod, and several flatfish species. These species move outside the 200-mile limit in response to changes in water temperature and food availability.

According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization: "On the Pacific coast, the degree of regional dependence on the fisheries is less than on the Atlantic. Nonetheless, the fisheries are an important component of the British Columbia economy. The UNFAO talks about historic actions in the B.C. fishery related to herring: "Herring were first caught in British Columbia in 1877, but a serious stock collapse of the fishmeal fishery in the 1950s led to a closure and a strong emphasis on preserving the resource." It also talks about the present: "Regulatory measures that have been employed in the fishery include input controls such as very short openings (some as short as 2 hours) and technical measures such as closures." This indicates that fisheries management lessons can be learned from the Pacific experience and bi-coastal management practices may apply.

Annual patrols in the North Pacific Ocean work to deter and detect illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing and verify compliance with the UN global moratorium on high seas driftnet fishing. IUU is environmentally destructive and economically detrimental, and threatens international marine resources, including many fish stocks, which are an important resource to many Canadian communities on the Pacific coast. Vessels can be using driftnets on the high seas greater than 2.5 km in length.

The biomass of global fish stocks have been allowed to run down to the point where it is no longer possible to catch the amount of fish that could be caught. According to a 2008 UN report, titled *The Sunken Billions: The Economic Justification for Fisheries Reform*, the world's fishing fleets incur a "\$US 50 billion annual economic loss" through depleted stocks and poor fisheries management. The report, produced jointly by the World Bank and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), asserts that half the world's fishing fleet could be scrapped with no change in catch: "By improving governance of marine fisheries, society could capture a substantial part of this \$50 billion annual economic loss. Through comprehensive reform, the fisheries sector could become a basis for economic growth and the creation of alternative livelihoods in many countries. At the same time, a nation's natural capital in the form of fish stocks could be greatly increased and the negative impacts of the fisheries on the marine environment reduced." Participants are now experiencing such low catches per unit of effort that it is rapidly becoming an uneconomic industry. Continued fishing on diminishing stocks could result in commercial extinction.

Regional Fisheries Management Organizations are the only vehicle the law of the sea provides for management of straddling stocks but they really have been given no effective powers to attain conservation in the absence of cooperation. NAFO has been particularly ineffective in managing the stocks under its protection.

Strengthening fisheries management could mean more initiatives like the following:

- In September 2010, NAFO Contracting Parties once again strengthened the compliance framework by enhancing the inspection and catch reporting regimes. Specifically, the time allowed on-board for vessel inspections in the NAFO Regulatory Area has been increased from three to four hours, and the composition of inspection parties has been increased from two to four inspectors (maximum). Vessels fishing in the NAFO Regulatory Area will also be required to report catches to NAFO on a daily basis, for all divisions and all species
- NAFO is proceeding with a Performance Review in 2010-2011. The Working Group overseeing this process will be composed of three external experts in fisheries management, fisheries science, and *Law of the Sea* matters, as well as internal experts from Canada, Denmark (in respect of Faroe Islands and Greenland), the European Union, and the Russian Federation. The Performance Review is expected to be completed by September 2011.

Recommendation

That the federal government:

1. Act with urgency following the NAFO performance review and lead the structural reformation of NAFO to make it an effective management organization that has the ability to achieve sustainable fisheries management through science, regulatory power and effective enforcement.
2. Apply the lessons learned to management of offshore fisheries in the Pacific and Arctic to maintain a commercially viable fishery for Canadian companies and workers.
3. Where necessary, exercise sovereign rights to protect re-building offshore fish stocks by means which may include but would not be limited to such measures as custodial management of the entirety of the Nose and Tail of the Grand Banks and the Flemish Cap, which extends beyond the 200 mile limit to include the natural geographical boundary of the continental shelf.