

# EUROPEAN BACKGROUND INFORMATION COMMUNITY

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## FISHING TOGETHER

A 200-mile Community fishing zone, negotiations on fishing rights with non-member countries, and the establishment of a Community system for the conservation and management of fishery resources. - These are the three main proposals of the European Commission on the future of the fishing industry in the Community.

### Creation of a 200-Mile Fishery Zone

Under the proposed resolution on the issue, which Sir Christopher Soames, the Commission Vice President in charge of external relations, described as the most difficult and complex issue that this Commission has had to deal with, member states would agree to extend, on a Community basis, their fishing zones 200 miles offshore into the North Sea and the North Atlantic. The member states could resolve to act as of January 1st, 1977, if the Council of Ministers was to agree.

The resolution follows the declaration of intent adopted last July 27th by the Council which said that any actions taken on a 200-mile economic zone should be in keeping with conclusions reached at the third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Nevertheless, as EC Commission Vice President Christopher Soames noted in presenting the proposal, the trend among countries with large fishing industries to extend unilaterally their fishing zones, without waiting for the outcome of UNCLOS, has forced the Commission to recommend like action in order to protect the interests of Community fishermen.

Several countries in the North Atlantic area, where the major part of Community fishing is done, have already moved to 200-mile zones or announced their intent to do so by Jan. 1st, 1977 -- or at the latest by March 1st, 1977.

The proposal does not advocate any action in the Baltic or the Mediterranean where so far no coastal states have extended their fishing zones, but the possibility of a similar EC move in these areas is left open should developments require it.

### Negotiations with Non-Member Countries

The Commission proposal makes clear that non-member countries would only be able to fish in the new zone if they negotiated new, bilateral fisheries agreements with the Community. Proposed guidelines for such negotiations are set out, taking into account the exploratory talks which the Commission has already had with a number of nations within the North Atlantic area. They would be framework agreements setting up the legal context under which both EC and third country fishermen might continue to fish each others' waters. The agreements would not cover actual tonnages or quotas, but would provide the basis for annual negotiations of these details.

Three broad categories of agreements are envisaged, determined by the country involved:

- Agreements with countries such as the United States and Canada to whose waters the Community would like access but whose fishermen do not traditionally fish in Community waters. Here the Community would seek to be treated at least as well as any third country in the allocation of surplus fish stocks.
- Agreements with countries such as Norway, Iceland, and the Soviet Union with which the Community has extensive interlinked fishing interests calling for reciprocal arrangements. The Commission would like any reduction in Community fishing in these countries' waters to be as gradual as possible. Such agreements could include joint measures to conserve fish stocks.
- Agreements with countries such as Poland, Finland, Sweden, and Spain that fish in Community waters but in whose waters EC fishermen have little interest. Without excluding some element of reciprocity, the Commission would like to see a progressive phasing out of these countries' access to the new zone.

### Community System for Conservation and Management of Fishery Resources

Aside from the question of the 200-mile zone proper, overfishing has reduced stocks in Community waters to dangerously low levels, as EC Commissioner for Agriculture, Pierre Lardinois, noted in a joint presentation with Sir Christopher Soames.

To remedy this, the Commission proposal contains a number of measures aimed at the rational management of this diminishing resource, so that stocks might be replenished and further abuses prevented. Such a policy of conservation, Mr. Lardinois said, can only be implemented at a supranational level. Close cooperation with national authorities is essential, however, if any limitations imposed are to be properly controlled.

The basis of the Commission proposal is the establishment of quotas, by species of fish, to be divided up between third countries and EC member states according to the negotiated agreements. Within the Community, member states would get a share proportionate to the size of their fishing industries or their economic needs.

In addition to limiting catch sizes, the Commission wants seasonal limits and certain technical requirements imposed as conservation measures.

Ultimately, the Commission would like to see the entire industry modernised and restructured in a more rational way. Community fleets were designed on the basis of large stocks and far-away fishing grounds which would not be in line with new conditions affecting Community fishermen. The fleet not only would have to be cut back in size, but would have to be readapted. A boat built for long voyages on the high seas is not suited economically or technically to a 200-mile zone.

The Commission's proposal contains the necessary programs to facilitate this reconversion, which would include on-land processing facilities, and would set aside the money to finance them.

The social consequences of these actions could be important, so the Commission and the member states would have to make sure that employment levels in those regions affected were maintained.

#### Exclusive Zones

The Commission proposal would extend the fishing zone under exclusive national sovereignty to 12 miles offshore for the entire Community coastline. Britain and Ireland want this zone set at 50 miles, which means there will be dissent within the Council over this provision when it comes time to discuss the Commission's proposal.

