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INTERNATIONAL TECHNICAL CONFERENCE ON THE CONSERVATION
OF THE LIVING RESOURCES OF THE SEA

A paper relating to items 9, 10b, 10d, 12a and 12b of the provisional agenda

In accordance with the advice of experts consulted by the Secretary-General, technical papers on certain items of the provisional agenda were invited from a number of authorities. The Secretary-General has the honour to communicate the following summary of a paper by Dr. Erik M. Poulsen, Executive Secretary of the International Commission for the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries (ICNAF). The full text of this paper is available as A/CONF.10/L.8.

CONSERVATION PROBLEMS IN THE NORTHWEST ATLANTIC
AND
RELATED ACTIVITY OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE NORTHWEST
ATLANTIC FISHERIES (ICNAF)

by

Erik M. Poulsen

SUMMARY

1. The problem of fishery conservation arises in nearly all cases where there is an extensive fishery, but the demand for conservation regulations has often been made sooner than the situation justified. In the life of a fishery, it is dangerous to postpone conservation measures to too late a date, but perhaps even more dangerous to introduce them too early, as in the case of a dense population which would be benefited by being thinned out. Conservation efforts must aim at controlling the population(s) in question at such a level of abundance that the individuals reach optimum size in as short a time as possible and then fishing them as soon as possible, before natural mortality has claimed too large a part. To achieve this requires much research.
2. The two main aims of fishery conservation are to secure to mankind a continued supply of fish sufficiently large to meet the demand, and to maintain a paying fishing industry. These aims are not always consistent, and we must determine the priority in each case.
3. When contemplating the introduction of regulations for a fishery, the research work on the species in question must be carried out not only in the area where it is fished but in the whole area throughout which the species is distributed, provided that it is connected with the fishing area.
4. Before we can study the effects on the resource of the intensity and kind of exploitation, we must have detailed statistical information about the exploitation itself. One of the chief aims of the work of the International Commission for the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries (ICNAF) has been to collect these data from the ten member countries fishing in the area.
5. The Commission has introduced international regulations for the haddock fishery off the New England coast, which have already produced beneficial results. These regulations provide for nets with a larger mesh than was standard in the past.

6. Regulations are now being considered for cod and haddock in Nova Scotian waters, since a decrease in yield has been observed, but the problem here is more complex than in the New England region. Research is also being done on the redfish stocks, whose yield on the old grounds has been declining, and on the halibut. In the latter case, the problem is not one of conserving an existing stock but the more difficult one of rebuilding an extremely depleted stock.

7. The work of conservation is perpetual and always changing, so that regulations introduced can never be final. It is also a world-wide question and must be studied as such.
