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LETTER DATED 29 JANUARY 1976 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE  
OF ICELAND TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF  
THE SECURITY COUNCIL

At the 1866th meeting of the Security Council on 16 December 1975 (S/PV.1866, p. 13) the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom stated the following:

"During the 1960s Icelandic fishermen seriously overfished the herring stocks around its shores, stocks which by 1967 had sunk to a critically low level."

It is a fact that by far the major part of the Icelandic herring catches in the period referred to consisted of the so-called Norwegian spring spawning component of the Atlanto-Scandian herring whose adults migrated to Icelandic waters for feeding purposes.

Recently (April 1975) the Liaison Committee of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) reviewed the reason for the depletion of this herring stock and the Committee's findings were published in ICES Cooperative Research Report No. 45 (appendix I). There the Committee stated that the decline of the stock was primarily caused by there being practically no recruitment to the adult stock after the 1959-1961 year classes were fully recruited in 1966.

The relevant portions of the report of the Committee are enclosed.

Since Icelandic fishermen never participated in the fishing of immature Norwegian spring spawning herring it is, of course, incorrect to blame them for overfishing this stock. It should, however, be added that following the advice from its scientists the Icelandic Government unilaterally imposed a ban on herring fisheries in Icelandic waters four years before this was accepted internationally with the result that relatively small local herring stocks, which also had suffered from heavy fishing, have now recovered and again become productive. On the other hand, there is no sign of recovery for those stocks which have been internationally managed. This also is clear from the Liaison Committee's report.

I have the honour to request that this letter, together with enclosure, be circulated as an official document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Ingvi INGVARSSON  
Permanent Representative  
of Iceland  
to the United Nations

Annex

Transcript from Cooperative Research Report No. 45  
(appendix I, pp. 20 and 21) of the Liaison Committee  
of the International Council for the Exploration of  
the Sea (ICES)

C.3 Atlanto-Scandian Herring

69. Following the request of the 12th Meeting of NEAFC for an updated review of the state of the Atlanto-Scandian herring, a meeting of the Working Group on Atlanto-Scandian Herring was convened in Bergen, 10-12 March 1975. The results of earlier assessments are available in Cooperative Research Report, Ser. B 1965, Ser. A, No. 17 (1969) and Ser. A, No. 30 (1971). The present assessment deals solely with the Norwegian spring spawning component of the Atlanto-Scandian stock; a recent assessment of the Icelandic Herring (Jakobsson, 1973) is available as ICES Doc. C.M.1973/H:4, but since 1971 catches from this part of the stock have been negligible because of Icelandic national regulation which has restricted fishing to the use of drift nets.

70. A review of catch trends shows that the highest catches of adult herring were taken in 1966 (1,724,000 tons). In 1967 this declined to 1,132,000 tons but in 1968 only 273,000 tons were caught. In 1969 and 1970 there was a further collapse to 24,000 tons and 20,500 tons. In those years fishable concentrations were found only during the spawning season and in 1971 the yield was only 7,000 tons. Since 1971 the only catches of adult herring have been for scientific purposes.

71. The total catch of immature herring reached a peak of 546,000 tons in 1967. In 1968 the catches were still at the high level of 439,000 tons but in 1969 and 1970 they fell to 44,000 tons and 40,000 tons respectively. During the next two years the catches of immature herring declined further to 14,000 tons in 1971 and 13,000 tons in 1972. In 1973 and 1974 catch quotas were in force which limited the catches to 6,800 tons and 6,300 tons respectively.

72. The latest study confirmed the earlier estimates that in the mid-1950s the adult stock of the Atlanto-Scandian herring was of the order of 10-15 million tons, and that by 1972 it had declined to around 3 million tons. In 1963-64 there was a temporary increase of the adult stock to about 6 million tons, but during the years 1965-67 the stock size decreased much more sharply than was formerly believed. One cause of this was an increased rate of exploitation, but primarily the decline was caused by there being practically no recruitment to the adult stock after the 1959-1961 year classes were fully recruited in 1966.

73. New estimates of year class strength for year classes 1959-69 are now available from cohort analyses. These estimates elucidate better than previous ones that fishing of immature herring was a major factor causing the recruitment

failure to the adult stock in the late sixties. Thus the year classes from 1963, 1964 and 1966 which is 0-group were estimated to be of "reasonable strength" (17-26 x 109) were all practically fished out before they reached maturity and never recruited in any significant number to the adult stock.

74. The year classes 1967-69 were all weak and their size as 0-group was probably about one tenth of the 1963 and 1964 year classes. Of these three weak year classes 1967-69, only the 1969 year class recruited to any extent to the adult stock. The recent year classes 1970-74 are all considered very weak and e.g. the 1970 year class will not recruit to the adult stock as a result of high fishing mortality in the small and fat herring fishery.

75. There is thus no evidence of any improvement in the state of the Norwegian spring spawning herring stock, and the spawning stock is probably now at such a low level that it is not capable of producing a strong year class.

76. The Liaison Committee recommends therefore that no fishing should be allowed on either the adult or the juvenile herring of this stock until there is evidence of a build-up of the adult stock to an acceptable level.

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