

MARINE FISHERIES AND THE LAW OF THE SEA: A DECADE OF CHANGE

Special chapter (revised) of
The State of Food and Agriculture 1992



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FAO Fisheries Department

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ABSTRACT

Ten years after the signing of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which marked the end of an era of freedom of the seas, this paper examines the changes that have occurred in marine fisheries and the adjustment made in the redistribution of benefits from the seas. While a few coastal states have gained large benefits and a few distant-water fishing nations have incurred large losses, there has been continued investment in large-scale vessels and a significant growth in fishing effort on the high seas beyond the 200-mile limits. The difficulty of improving the management of domestic fisheries and the required improvements in the competence of nations to exercise their newly gained authority are noted. While the 1980s might be considered a period of adjustment to the dramatic changes in the law of the sea, environmental issues have gained increasing significance during the decade and are posing difficult challenges particularly to the small-scale fishing communities in the coastal zones. Before the benefits from the ocean's fisheries can be fully realized, many tasks have to be completed, including concerted national and international efforts for better fisheries management.

PREPARATION OF THIS DOCUMENT

Since 1957, *The State of Food and Agriculture* annual review has included one or more special studies of problems of longer-term interest. This present document is a revision of the special chapter from *The State of Food and Agriculture 1992*. Twelve years ago the 1980 special chapter, entitled "Marine fisheries in the new era of national jurisdiction", analysed the problems and opportunities for fisheries in the era following the United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). This document reconsiders the state of world fisheries ten years after the signing of the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. Whereas the 1980 edition was optimistic for improvements in the management of fishery resources as a result of extensions in national jurisdiction, this document shows that, within the decade, progress has been slow.

The issues and problems of both national and high sea fisheries would appear not to have changed significantly from those covered in the first special chapter on fisheries in *The State of Food and Agriculture 1967*, "The management of fishery resources". In that chapter, the difficulties experienced by international fishery commissions, the problems of excessive fishing effort, subsidies, enforcement and the need to reduce costs of fishing were discussed. Some 25 years later, it would now appear that, although understanding of the problems is almost universal, practical solutions are relatively few. The problems that then existed for the North Atlantic and the North Pacific have now expanded worldwide and primarily concern the difficulties of rational exploitation of common property resources.

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**PART III
MARINE FISHERIES
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- I. Introduction**
- II. The decade's developments**
- III. Current and future issues**
- IV. Appendix 1**
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