

Abstract

FISHING ON COMMON GROUNDS. The Consequences of unregulated Fisheries of North Sea Herring in the Postwar Period. (Publications of the Department of Economic History, School of Economics and Commercial Law, Göteborg University, no 94).

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This is a case study of management of fisheries conducted in international waters. The case is the North Sea herring fisheries in the 1960s and 70s and the collective attempt to halt the overfishing of the herring stocks. The aim of the research is to increase our knowledge and understanding of the effect of collective action on solving over-fishing problems in the open sea prior to the establishment of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Did the collective agreement succeed in halting the heavy exploitation and what difficulties, if any, hindered a reasonable solution? The nations conducting this fishery negotiated the management of the North Sea herring fisheries inside the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC).

Like all commercial fisheries, the herring fishery in the North Sea underwent considerable technical change during the post-war period. This increased the fishing effort of the fleet and the pressure on herring stocks until they were overfished. Until 1970, there was a tendency to use the scientific uncertainty over the state of the stock and the lack of proof acceptable to NEAFC as a reason to continue the fishery. The nature of the management objectives and how agreement on the allocation of the total allowable catch could be reached was heavily debated. Despite negotiations and collective agreements, the depletion was not halted. The institutional arrangement established was not effective enough to halt the negative trend. By studying the case of the North Sea herring fishery there is a possibility to study how an institutional changes occur.

KEYWORDS: North Sea, herring, the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC), resource, fishery history, herring fisheries, overfishing, exploitation, management, common resource, property rights, institutional change, collective agreement.