

ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVES

OVERFISHING: A GLOBAL CHALLENGE

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From the editor:

As representatives from more than 100 U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) member countries meet in Rome February 24-28, 2003, they face a crisis in the ocean's fisheries that gets surprisingly little attention from the world's press. By FAO estimates, more than 70 percent of those fisheries are depleted or nearly depleted even as more and more of the world's people depend on those fish stocks for food and livelihoods. Competition between countries over access to fishing grounds has already spawned confrontation, even violence. This issue of Economic Perspectives presents 10 articles from governments, industry and the environmental community providing background information about this problem and possible solutions.

The FAO's Committee on Fisheries (COFI) has an opportunity at its February meeting to bring overfishing under control if its members can agree on ways to implement existing agreements, Assistant Secretary of State John Turner says in the lead article. Alice Mattice of the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) says that World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiators can effect part of that implementation if they can agree on eliminating subsidies that encourage overfishing. Commander John Davis of the U.S. Coast Guard describes how U.S. and Russian patrol boats cooperate with each other to enforce the global moratorium on driftnet fishing. Angela Somma of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) describes the economic and environmental costs of overfishing; David Balton of the State Department outlines the complex web of multinational agreements and regional organizations aimed at managing and conserving fisheries, and NMFS' Dean Swanson tells how the U.S. government implements its international obligations on marine conservation. Four articles on overfishing are from non-U.S. government experts. The FAO's David Doullman says countries need to demonstrate political will to halt overfishing. Scott Burns of the World Wildlife Fund suggests three discrete sets of actions to make marine conservation work. Justin LeBlanc of the National Fisheries Institute warns that marine conservation cannot work without participation by all the relevant markets. And Paul Nichols, an adviser to the Namibian government, tells how one developing country has stopped illegal overfishing in its 200-mile coastal zone.

Other sections provide background information, links to relevant Internet sites, and selected readings about overfishing. We hope that this journal will contribute to the international discussion of this important issue.