

VI. Summary

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The commercial cod fishery at Greenland in this century started in 1911 by Greenland fishermen using hand- and long-lines from small boats, mainly rowing boats. Until 1924 Greenland was the only participant, and annual catches in that period did not reach 1 000 tons. Nations other than Greenland came into the picture from 1924, first Norway, followed in 1925 by the Faroe Islands and the UK, by France in 1928 and Portugal in 1931. During the pre-World War II period all were fishing with hand- and/or long-lines except in 1935–36 the UK had noteworthy catches (up to 5 600 tons) taken by trawlers, and Portugal some few hundred tons during 1936–39. Pre-war catches peaked with 130 000 tons in 1936, but only in two of the other pre-war years (1931 and 1937) did total catch exceed the 100 000 tons. World War II stopped foreign fishing at Greenland except for Portugal (the Faroe Islands fished in 1940). Greenland's own annual reported catches during the war remained at the 20 000 tons level, while the total catch may have been two-three times that.

The post-World War II period soon saw the pre-war participants the Faroe Islands, France, Norway and the UK back at West Greenland. Portugal was there already, and Spain joined from 1946. These nations evidently had their fishing fleets ready to operate, probably with a very hampered UK fleet. However, by 1949 UK landings by trawlers reached the 20 000 tons level, and by 1953 a total of 105 UK trawlers landed 34 000 tons of cod, many of them making more than one trip to Greenland. They were nearly all steam side trawlers built after the war.

The 1950–60s were characterized by a continuation of the traditional nations fishing with increasing numbers of trawlers, and by newcomers from Europe. Iceland from 1948, Italy from 1950 (Italy, however, never played a big role), the FRG from 1952, the GDR from 1958, Poland with limited effort in the 1960s, and the USSR also with limited effort so far as cod at Greenland was concerned from 1959 to 1974. These newcomers used trawlers only. Especially the FRG rapidly built up a fleet of modern diesel-powered trawlers, gradually substituting side trawlers with stern trawlers, which were highly efficient even in bad weather. The trawlers permitted fishing throughout the year.

By the end of the 1960s it became clear that the cod resource was decreasing due to less favourable environmental conditions influencing recruitment coupled with the high rate of exploitation. The resulting lower catch rates generally meant less interest in the fishery. The localized Greenland fleet of small boats had no other choice than to fish in Greenland waters, but partly switched to shrimp fishing and for a shorter period to seasonal salmon fishing. Greenland also built large trawlers, and these had the effect that Greenland's catch remained relatively high during the 1970–80s. FRG also continued fishing for cod but with much less effort than in the 1950–60s. Other nations generally phased out their cod fishing in Greenland waters in the late-1970s, influenced also by the international regulations and extension of fisheries territories.

At East Greenland the cod fishing activity and the catches were much lower than those at West Greenland. Greenland itself has only a very small local population there, and the Greenland trawlers were not going there unless fishing was thought to be much better than at the west coast to compensate the extra sailing. The major nations fishing at East Greenland after World War II were FRG, UK and Iceland.

Seen over the total period from 1910–95, Table 4 illustrates the output of the resource for each nation. It shows that the total output of the resource (West plus East) during the period was about 10 million tons. The coastal state Greenland took about 15% of that total.

Portugal with 2.1 million tons was outstanding. So was Germany, especially since nearly its whole catch of 1.8 million tons (including 125 000 tons by GDR 1958–72) was taken after World War II. These contrast with catches by Greenland, Faroe Islands and France, which are "traditional" participants, with an output of 1.2–1.5 million tons each followed by Norway recording about 900 000 tons, while UK, Spain and Iceland have some 100 000 tons each. Italy, Denmark, USSR, Poland, USA, Canada and Japan complete the list, the latter three with catches below 1 000 tons each.