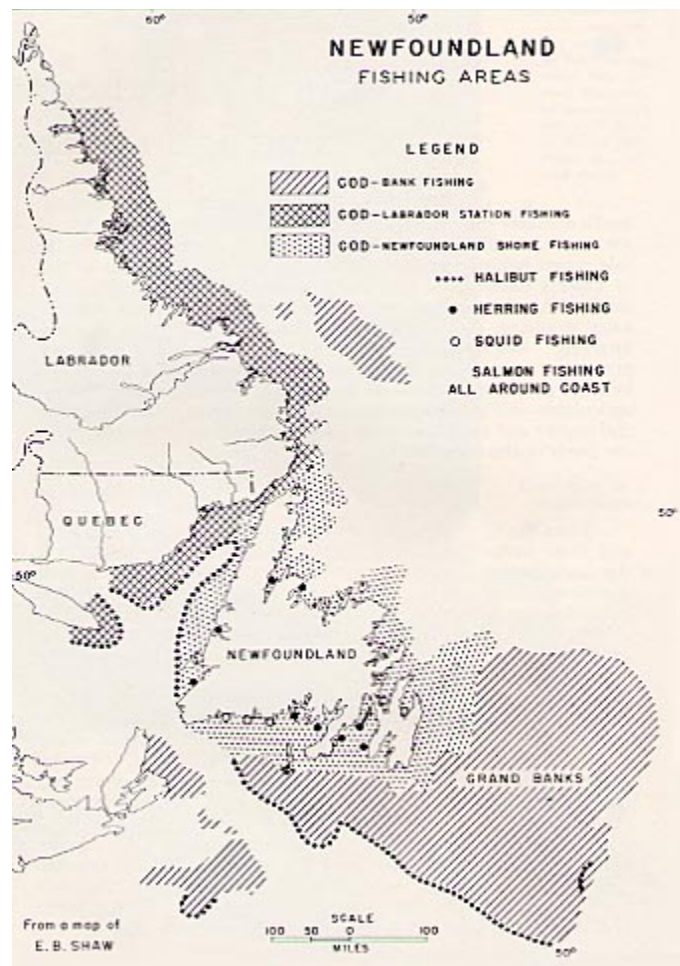


# Who Owns the Fish?

The question of ownership of the fish and marine resource off the coast of British North America (now Canada) caused much conflict.

Eventually, the conflicts were partly resolved in 1818 where it was stated that fishermen not under British rule could not fish within **three miles of British North American shores**.



The Department of Marine and Fisheries was set up in 1867 when the federal government was given authority over the fisheries. Canada and the United States had several agreements and conflicts about fishing rights.

More than a thousand scattered communities on the Atlantic coast depended on the fishery and often found it difficult to make a decent living.

# Rules and Regulations

Fish and other marine life reproduce within our lifetime. For that reason, this resource is considered renewable. However, available stock of many commercial species of fish and marine life has been very unpredictable and fishermen often lead a life of boom or bust.

As technology improved, fishermen became much more efficient. This resulted in too many fish being caught, making it harder to keep the industry sustainable. (Remember, you defined sustainable earlier in this lesson.)



To conserve supply and ensure that people could continue to earn their income by fishing, **license limitation** (limiting the number of fish) began in 1967-68.

The problem of too many fishermen and depleting stocks caused on going problems of low incomes and instability.

In the mid-1970s foreign fishing became a national issue. Canada extended its fishing limits to **200 nautical miles** from the coast (about 370 km) on January 1, 1977.

Shellfish eventually overtook **groundfish**\*\***(see definition below)** as the main fishery and, although it produced fewer processing jobs, the shellfish boom brought a record-breaking increase in Atlantic landed value.

**Definition: Groundfish - are fish that live on, in, or near the bottom of the body of water they inhabit. Some typical saltwater groundfish species are cod, flounder, halibut, and sole.**

# British Columbia Fisheries

On the Pacific Coast, salmon and herring were the most common fish caught and salmon canneries were built 1800's. A *salmon cannery* is a factory that commercially cans salmon. It is a fish processing industry that became established on the Pacific coast of North America starting in the 1900s.

**Communities developed where canneries were located**, unlike the scattered settlement on the Atlantic coast. Even in isolated places, the industry depended on bringing together many plant workers and boats to take advantage of the seasonal migrations of Pacific salmon.



Above image of the North Pacific Cannery in Prince Rupert, BC, and connecting living shacks.

The North Pacific Cannery in Prince Rupert, BC, boasts the longest running cannery in BC's history. Built in 1890, it was operational until the 70's providing almost 90 years of continuous production. The labor force within the cannery was divided according to race and culture, with Japanese fishing and net mending, First Nations fishing and working on the cannery line, Chinese on the cannery line and cooking, and Europeans fishing and managing.

The North Pacific Cannery is now a national historic site.

After the First World War (ended 1918), war veterans returning to BC needed employment so the license limitation was lifted for salmon fishing for this group only. Restrictions remained for some time for Aboriginal people and Japanese-Canadians. Because of this, white fishermen gained dominance in the fishery. Do you think this was fair for the First Nations people?

# Sustainability and a Changing Practice

## Fisheries In Trouble

Although fish are a renewable resource, overfishing can deplete stocks. Here is what happened in Canada with overfishing:

- Herring stocks were dangerously depleted and the government **banned fishing** them from 1967 to 1972 to try to increase the populations.
- Cod numbers on the Atlantic coast were drastically reduced and **strict limits** were placed on them in 1982.
- Salmon stocks took a drastic decline in the mid-1990s. By 1997, **strict controls** to help them recover kept many boats tied up for 10 or 11 months of the year.

As a result, many people lost jobs. For example:

- As fewer fish were being caught, canneries closed one after the other until the last salmon cannery in BC closed in 2015.
- Because of stock depletion, around **40 000 people**, mostly fish plant employees, lost work in the Atlantic provinces and Québec alone. BC experienced the same high job losses.

Overfishing and habitat loss were some of the factors that led to the decline.

## Will aquaculture save the day?

**Definition: Aquaculture** - *Aquaculture, also known as aquafarming*, refers to "fish farming" (the breeding, rearing, and harvesting of plants and animals in all types of water environments). It can take place in natural water bodies such as ponds, lakes, marshland or brackish water and the ocean. It can also be conducted in man-made tanks, commonly found in fish hatcheries. Typical species that are found in aquacultural systems include oysters, salmon, trout, hard and soft-shell clams and other shellfish.

Today, salmon aquaculture (farming) has been increasing the supply of fish. By 2002, production value reached \$639 million, mostly from farmed Atlantic salmon. Fish farmers on the Atlantic side farm Atlantic salmon as well. BC provided more than half of Canada's aquaculture value.

**Check out the link for more information:**

<https://www.aquaculturealliance.org/blog/what-is-aquaculture-why-do-we-need-it/>

**What have happened to fish stocks of cod and salmon on both the East and West coast of Canada? Why did this happen?**

**Using words and/or pictures answer in the space below.**

**Extension: Create a fishing rod using materials at home.**