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## EU states lose West African fishing rights

**Aberdeen, Scotland:** Vessels from European Union member states have found themselves frozen out of lucrative West African fishing grounds.

The European Commission has failed to gain an extension to the accord on fishing rights which has given European trawlers access to Senegal's offshore waters since 1997. The EU had paid Senegal €48m for the right to fish its waters from 1997 to March 2001, and the accord had been extended twice since then. However, negotiations for a third extension have ended in deadlock.

### Crucial to earnings

The breakdown in negotiations comes amid growing concern over the rapid depletion of fish stocks along the West African coast. Senegal has the most successful fishing industry in the region; fish exports now account for nearly a third of the country's foreign exchange earnings. Up to half a million people are directly dependent on the fishing industry for their livelihood.

### Growing numbers of foreign trawlers

However, in the face of growing numbers of European and Asian trawlers targeting these fisheries, Senegalese officials have found it impossible to reconcile the conflicting interests of the country's trade balance with a growing threat to fish stocks. Scientists have recently voiced concerns that developing countries which allow access to foreign fishing fleets may lose more than they gain in income from the arrangements, since the visiting vessels can cause devastating damage to stocks.

At the most recent talks, agreement could not be reached over Senegal's wish to extend the area restricted to the local fishing fleet, rest periods for the recovery of stocks, and the price of a new accord. The talks may or may not resume next month. Meanwhile, EU member states' trawlers have moved out of the area.

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