

# Morocco's Fish Stock

## *Dangerous Decline*

The decision of the Moroccan government to ban fishing activities in the south between Dakhla and Boujdour is yet another indication that fishing stock is in a dangerous decline. It is also an example of an industry out of control that needs immediate attention from government authorities and the general public.

Banning fishing in effected regions is one of the methods that the Moroccan government would like to introduce to save its resources, however fishing in the region is not a strictly environmental concern only. It is a highly political issue involving Morocco with its very powerful neighbor the EU, and in particular Spain. Any decision that the Moroccan government makes concerning the regulation of fishing is subject to resistance from the European fishing lobby.

According to fishing experts in Morocco, the agreements that Kingdom has with foreign nations have only worsened the situation. The first nations to be singled out are Spain, Portugal, Japan and Russia. The deterioration of the fish stock, and sardine in particular, is seen as the result of over exploitation of the fishing areas. The Spanish fishing fleet is blamed for most of the over exploitation.

Between Dakhla and Boujdour, the most effected zone, yearly catch has increased in a dramatic way. In 1996 alone, 650,000 tons of sardines were caught primarily by the Russian fishing fleet. In 1997 Spanish trawlers caught 150,000 tons of sardine compared to 30,000 tons in 1983.

Over exploitation is not the only source of problems for the fish stock in the region. The Moroccan authorities themselves are to be blamed for the lack of control and law enforcement. Without an efficient control and enforcement system in place fishing fleets are certainly able to exceed their quotas without any way of knowing it.

In Morocco today two different groups give an explanation of the problem depending on their interest. one group blames foreign fleets for the decline of the fish stock. Obviously, this group wants foreign fishermen out of the Moroccan waters. The newly created Fishing Federation of Morocco is one of them. It says that fishing should help boost job creation but as long as Morocco continues to allow foreign fleets not only the local fishing industry will be in a disadvantage situation but the fish stock will be depleted rapidly.

A second group points the finger towards the government accusing it of being a complicated bureaucratic administration unable to regulate the industry.

In fact, the problem of fishing in Morocco is a combination of both reasons mentioned above. Overexploitation and an inefficient administration are the cause of the problem.

The banning of fishing activities in a 120 kilometer-zone ordered by the Moroccan government is indeed a welcome first step. In addition, Mr. Thami Khyari, the new Fishing Minister, reported that his government would not renew the fishing agreement between Morocco and the EU in its current format. Protective measures for both the fish stock and the domestic industry will be included in future negotiations. Perhaps Morocco learned the hard way that its current agreements with a number of nations have been counterproductive for both its natural resources and Moroccan fishermen.

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*& In Algeria*

## **Time to “Catch Up.”**

Fish consumption in Algeria remains very low compared to international standards. Consumption in Algeria is estimated to be a little over 6 pounds per person per year while the average consumption at the international level is estimated to be 16 pounds. Mediterranean countries are among top consumers of fish (26 pounds) following northern Pacific countries (40 pounds).

The current government has just allowed an additional 150 large size trawlers to fish beyond Algerian waters (12 miles). While these trawlers will also be allowed to export their catch, they are obligated to bring 70% of their catch to Algerian seaports of their choice. This measure is taken to increase domestic fish consumption by stimulating competition that will result in the decline of prices. At present, fish in Algeria is much more expensive than red meat and poultry. In general, the average middle class household cannot afford buying fish with current prices.