

EU And Senegal Fail To Agree On Fishing Rights

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The European Commission has failed to extend an accord on fishing rights, which has given European trawlers access to Senegal's offshore waters since 1997.

The breakdown this week in negotiations between the Commission and Senegal comes amid growing concern about the depletion of fish stocks along the West African coast. Talks may or may not resume next month. Meanwhile trawlers, mainly from France, Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal, have pulled in their nets.

Senegal, perched on Africa's western-most tip, has the most successful fishing industry in the region with fish exports now accounting for nearly a third of foreign exchange earnings. In months of negotiations with the EU, Senegalese officials sought to reconcile the conflicting interests of the country's trade balance with a growing threat to fish stocks.

Increasing numbers of European and Asian trawlers are targeting the poorly policed West African coast to make up for shortfalls on their own markets.

EU and Senegalese officials said the talks foundered over Senegalese attempts to extend the area restricted to the local fishing fleet, rest periods for the recovery of stocks, as well as the price of a new record.

Senegal's fish export industry grew rapidly in the 1990s on the back of the 1994 devaluation of the CFA franc, export subsidies and customs duty exemptions under the preferential terms of the Lome agreement.

European trawlers gained restricted access to Senegal's waters in 1997 in a deal that netted 48m ecu for the Senegalese government. But the accord, which has been extended twice since its expiry last March, has led to growing tensions between the nation's artisanal fleet and high-technology industrial trawlers from Europe.

Up to 500,000 Senegalese depend on the fishing industry for their livelihood. While local fishermen are better armed than in the past - some use satellite positioning to pinpoint fertile territory and mobile phones to relay details of their catch to traders onshore - their traditional hook and line methods cannot compete with the techniques of foreign rivals.

Moreover, environmentalists believe damage to fish stocks is caused mainly by foreign trawlers. These



Map of Senegal

tend to throw overboard vast quantities of unwanted species, while some techniques destroy the habitat and diet of larger predatory fish.

The United Nations Environment Programme (Unep) said last month new research had found developing countries that opened up to foreign fishing fleets may lose more than they gain. Unep warned that liberalisation in two case studies, Senegal and Argentina, "has had a devastating effect on some key stocks".

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webmaster@fishbelly.com