

‘How did involvement in the EEC, 1973-1989, affect the Republic of Ireland’ (2015)

The continental shelf around Ireland was a shallow sea area that provided fertile fishing grounds. The Irish fishing industry made good progress in the 1960s but were still underdeveloped until they joined the EEC on the 1st of January 1973 along with Denmark, a country half of Ireland's size that caught twenty times the amount of fish.

The EEC used its Structural Fund to encourage economic development in Ireland. They dredged harbours, improved roads and set up processing plants. It also increased grants so that fishermen could modernise their ships. In 1970 there were just 27 fishing boats over 100 tonnes in the Irish fishing fleet. By 1975 this had risen to 59 and by 1989 it was over 80.

By the end of the 1980s, there were 113 fish processing plants, this created many jobs. Collectively these businesses employed over 3,000 people, 60% along the south and west coast, where the jobs were always difficult to find. The number of fishermen also increased. Between 1973 and 1989 the number of fishermen grew from about 2,200 to 4000.

EEC also provided funds to investigate new methods of farming shellfish such as salmon. They had difficulty finding suitable sites but by 1980s these difficulties had been overcome by the use of large flexible rubber-rimmed cages in which salmon could safely grow. Fish farming also created jobs and by 1989 there were almost 3,000 employed

They also expanded their market. By late 1980s 20% of the value of exports went to the UK, over 25% went to France and 10% went to Germany. New markets were also set up to transport herring roe (eggs) to Japan. Killybegs exported blocks of frozen mackerel to Nigeria and Egypt.

The 'Cod-wars' then broke out between the UK and Iceland over a dispute regarding territorial waters. So in 1973 the United Nations organised an international conference on the 'Law of the

Sea'. They talked about setting up an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Iceland declared their own EEZ and Canada and US indicated that they might do the same.

The Hague Resolution of 1976 changed the Common Fisheries Policy so that the Community as a whole would now have an EEZ of 200 miles and individual countries would control their own 12-mile territorial waters. They also set up the Total Allowable Catch which was a quota of each species of fish.

The EEZ badly affected Spanish and Portuguese who were not yet part of the EEC, so they joined on the 1st of January 1986 but they were not allowed to fish inside a 50-mile zone around Ireland for the first 10 years after entry. They still continued to illegally fish, which was bad because Spain was one of the largest consumers of fish per head of population in Europe.

The impact of the EEC on Irish fishing industry was mixed. Their industrial growth accelerated after joining the EEC because of the structural fund but on the other hand Ireland no longer had control over the seas around its coast but had to share them with fishermen from other states and the quota system was widely seen as unfair.