

Examine how conflict can arise between economic interests and environmental interests regarding the exploitation of resources, with reference to one example that you have studied (30m)

I have chosen to examine economic and environmental conflict with regard to the Irish fish stock and their depletion.

From an environmental standpoint, fishing practices within Irish waters are unsustainable. Landings of demersal fish have decreased significantly (species which live close to the floor of the sea or a lake). One of the worst affected is Cod, whereby a Cod Recovery Plan has been put in place (Cod spawning grounds are closed for several weeks annually in the Irish sea). Misreporting and under-reporting has been noted as a serious problem within the fishing industry. Prior to 2004, Ireland's fishing grounds comprised a little less than 20% of total E.U. waters, now it is approximately 12%. Deepwater species are now being targeted off the continental shelf. The slow growth and low fertility of these species point to the threat of rapid depletion of stock. Nearly all of the Atlantic fish catch is taken from waters of the continental shelf, primarily from the nutrient-rich areas, where upwellings of currents occur. This environmentally sensitive area includes important commercial fish taken in the North Atlantic such as the demersal (deep-dwelling) species such as lobster and members of the Gadidae (cod) family—notably haddock and cod—and such pelagic (free-swimming) species as lobster, mackerel and herring. To sustain these species, TACs (Total Allowable Catches) were established in Brussels under the CFP, which meant that Irish fishermen had to adhere to quotas of fish allowed to be caught. This was done to protect species and numbers of fish that were being over-fished however this then led to an environmentally unsustainable practice whereby fishermen discarded fish which were over the quota they were allowed.

New approaches to this primary industry have been introduced because of this conflict between the environmental sustainability of our fish stock, as highlighted initially in the 1970's by what became known as the 'Tragedy of the Commons', and on the other side, economic interests. The creation of jobs and wealth in what is a peripheral and economically deprived region of Ireland is critical to this conflict. As a result of restrictions placed on catches (TAC), many fishing communities are now turning to aquaculture, actively supported by the EU, as a means of employment. Ideal conditions exist for fish farming with pollution-free waters off the west and south coasts in Ireland. Also numerous sheltered bays, where regular tides flush out any toxic waste produced by the farmed fish, produce ideal conditions for aquaculture. There are now 1,800 people directly employed in aquaculture in Ireland, not taking into account any spin-off businesses (eg. Cage making, preparation of fish feed, fish processing). This, combined with a very experienced local community, allows large quantities of fish to be farmed under government incentives. In 2017, the GDP of the Irish seafood sector was estimated at 1.15 billion, representing a 6.4% year on year increase. More than 14,000 men and women are employed in Ireland's seafood sector, many of whom work and live in rural coastal communities throughout Ireland.

Therefore, while conflict has arisen in the fishing industry of Ireland between environmental and economic interests, the European Union has looked to protect EU fish stock through the diversification of our the industry primarily with aquaculture.