

The original documents are located in Box 125, folder “Tuna Boats” of the Ron Nessen Papers at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

Copyright Notice

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Ron Nessen donated to the United States of America his copyrights in all of his unpublished writings in National Archives collections. Works prepared by U.S. Government employees as part of their official duties are in the public domain. The copyrights to materials written by other individuals or organizations are presumed to remain with them. If you think any of the information displayed in the PDF is subject to a valid copyright claim, please contact the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

ECUADOR - TUNA BOAT SEIZURES

Q: Ecuador has seized seven U.S. tuna boats, imposed heavy fines and confiscated their catch. What does the U.S. intend to do about this resumption of what has been termed "the Tuna War"?

A: We deeply regret that Ecuador has taken these actions and that the boat owners appeals have been refused by the Ecuadorean Appeals Commission. We have made our position known to the Ecuadorean Government both in Washington and in Quito, and are reviewing the situation and the legal questions involved.

As you know, Ecuador, along with a few other countries, claims full sovereignty over the seas for 200 miles from the shore, while the U.S. recognizes only a three-mile territorial waters and an additional nine-mile exclusive fishery zone. We continue to believe that the best way to handle differences of this kind is by arriving at international agreement on such questions in the ongoing international Law of the Seas conferences. The next session of the conference is convening in Geneva in March. Considerable progress has been made in these talks, and we are hopeful that a satisfactory solution to this and other difficult questions related to use of the world's oceans and their resources will be reached.

[FYI: Ecuador has seized seven U.S. tuna boats since January 24. The fines levied on the boats will total about \$1.5 million and their catch, valued at over \$1 million, apparently will be confiscated in accordance with Ecuadorean law. The Ecuadorean Appeals Commission has confirmed the penalties levied against four of the vessels. Several other appeals are still pending. The owners should be compensated under the provisions of the Fisherman's Protective Act, but the amount held by Treasury for this purpose will probably not be adequate without further Congressional appropriations. The fishing season is a particularly good one this year and a large number of U.S. boats are fishing inside the 200 miles without purchasing licenses from the Ecuadorean Government.

Further FYI: The Senate has passed a bill excluding the U.S. fisheries zone to 200 miles. This action tends to lend support to the Ecuadorean claims.]

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

March 11, 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR: RON NESSEN

FROM: MARGI VANDERHYE

SUBJECT: Guidance on ~~Tuna~~ Boats Seized
 by Ecuador

In response to questions raised by the press during yesterday's and today's briefings, you may wish to keep in mind the following points:

1. Every year suggestions are made that we escort the U.S. tuna fleet with American warships. We do not believe ~~this~~ would provide an effective remedy. To reintroduce this means of resolving disputes would be resented throughout the hemisphere and would damage broader U.S. interests. We believe that disagreements of this nature should be resolved by negotiation and we are encouraged that progress is being made.
2. Monday, March 17, the Law of the Sea Conference reconvenes in Geneva and we hope that the Conference will produce an agreement this year which will provide internationally agreed rules governing conduct for man's uses of the seas. We believe that the issue of coastal jurisdiction over fisheries should be addressed in the context of the Law of the Sea Conference.
3. Withdrawing the ships we have on loan to Ecuador would exacerbate the situation without resolving any issues.
4. A negotiating team was in Ecuador last month subsequent to a formal protest over the seizures. Discussions are continuing on the problem.