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Office of the White House Press Secretary

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THE WHITE HOUSE

## STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

I am today signing a bill which provides a comprehensive domestic and international program for the conservation and management of our fisheries.

The extension of our jurisdiction to 200 miles will enable us to protect and conserve the valuable fisheries off our coasts. It is indeed unfortunate that the slow pace of the negotiations of the United Nations Law of the Sea Conference has mandated our course of action here today. However, the foreign overfishing off our coasts cannot be allowed to continue without resolution.

The need for a timely and successful Law of the Sea Conference is even more pressing today than ever before. I have directed our negotiators to make every effort, consistent with our basic interests, to conclude the substantive negotiations this year. The bill I sign today is generally consistent with the consensus emerging at the Conference. It is increasingly apparent that a failure to reach substantive agreement this year will move the world community inevitably toward disorder respecting competing use of the oceans. In the absence of a timely treaty, no nation can be assured that its paramount interest in the oceans will be protected.

Some specific aspects of this legislation require comment. I supported this legislation on the condition that the effective date of the legislation would be delayed so that the Law of the Sea Conference could complete its work and to permit sufficient time for a proper transition.

The tasks of continuing our negotiating efforts at the Law of the Sea Conference and at the same time establishing new fishery plans, issuing hundreds of new fishing permits and negotiating specific fishery agreements with foreign governments will require substantial resources in excess of those presently allocated to international fisheries affairs. The Departments of State, Commerce, and Transportation must do their best to implement the Act fully. Since available resources are finite, however, it is possible that full implementation may take more time than is provided in the Act.

I am concerned about our ability to fulfill the tasks in the time and manner provided in the Act. I am particularly anxious that no action be taken which would compromise our commitment to protect the freedom of navigation and the welfare of our distant water fisheries. Surely we would not wish to see the United States engaged in international disputes because of an absence of needed flexibility.

Additionally, I am concerned about four specific problem areas which are raised by this legislation:

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First, absent affirmative action, the subject bill could raise serious impediments for the United States in meeting its obligations under existing treaty and agreement obligations;

Second, the bill contemplates unilateral enforcement of a prohibition on foreign fishing for native anadromous species, such as salmon, seaward of the 200-mile zone. Enforcement of such a provision, absent bilateral or multilateral agreement, would be contrary to the sound precepts of international jurisprudence;

Third, the enforcement provisions of H.R. 200 dealing with the seizure of unauthorized fishing vessels, lack adequate assurances of reciprocity in keeping with the tenets of international law; and

Fourth, the measure purports to encroach upon the exclusive province of the Executive relative to matters under international negotiations.

Although these matters are of major importance, I am hopeful they can be resolved by responsible administrative action and, if necessary, by curative legislation. Accordingly, I am instructing the Secretary of State to lead Administration efforts toward their effective resolution.

GERALD R. FORD

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