The Joint Technical Commission for the Maritime Front (CTMFM) performs a very specific function in accordance with its uppermost objective of “conducting studies and adopting and coordinating plans and measures for the conservation, preservation and rational exploitation of living resources and the protection of the marine environment in the zone of common interest established in Article 73” (Article 80). Its activity will be described chronologically to focus on the successive stages in its operation. To emphasize the close link that exists between the activities the CTMFM develops, the syntax used in Article 80 leaves no doubt as to the subordination of all the envisaged acts in pursuit of its goal of managing living resources.

From the abovementioned provision arises a difference between the name of the zone described in Article 73, “Common Fishing Zone”, and that mentioned in Articles 79, 80 and 82 (b) and (d), “Zone of Common Interest.” The Treaty does not identify a Zone of Common Interest of a different nature from that of the Common Fishing Zone. Both Article 79, concerning Research, and Articles 80 and 82 (b) and (d), which refer to CTMFM’s capacities concerning the protection of the marine environment, mention a zone of common interest that can only have the scope that Article 73 gives it. The Common Fishing Zone (ZCP) encompasses the Parties’ common interests of using the marine living resources.

1. The early years 1977–1982

On 15 July 1974, the CTMFM’s Statute was approved by agreement through exchange of notes between Argentina and Uruguay. The Treaty established a period of sixty days from its entry into force to set up the Joint Technical Commission
(Article 91). It entered into force on 12 February 1974 and since the adoption of its Statute, the Commission was capable of performing its activities. However, it was not until 1976 that the first meetings took place at the Santos Palace, seat of the Uruguayan Ministry of Foreign Affairs and at the San Martín Palace, seat of the Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs. On 16 August 1976, the first formal meeting was held after the Commission was set up in the city of Montevideo. On 3 and 4 February 1977, the second meeting took place in which the implementation of CTMFM’s goal, as entrusted by the Treaty, was agreed upon together with the need to focus, prior to this, on the creation of the adequate administrative, technical and budgetary infrastructure to carry it out.\(^1\) The Internal Regulations were drawn up and approved at the third general meeting, held in July 1977. At the same time, the Headquarters’ Agreement was negotiated with Uruguay and was signed on 28 April 1977.\(^2\)

Once the necessary means and infrastructure were secured, financed by the member States contributions, the CTMFM was capable of undertaking the function that it had been assigned in the Treaty. On 5 July 1977, at the fourth meeting, the representatives of both countries engaged in the task of organising a work schedule. On that occasion the political, scientific and economic significance of the Commission’s task was manifest, concerning the greater and better knowledge and exploitation of the living resources of the vast Common Fishing Zone.

The Administrative Secretariat and the Technical Secretariat began their activities on 1 July 1977, when the respective Secretaries took over their positions. The Technical Secretariat tackled, as a first task, the compilation of the scientific studies on fisheries research published both in Argentina and in Uruguay, both concerning the methods and procedures for the study of the ichthyic resources and the theories and methods for their assessment. Simultaneously, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) was contacted with a view to becoming acquainted both with the research tasks carried out in CTMFM’s area of competence and with the experts in ichthyic resources and publications made. Within the Commission, it was perceived that it was necessary to garner information and knowledge on fisheries, and that the publications of highest relevance concerning the fisheries and the species of special interest in the region should be acquired to that end. From the beginning, the task of collection and production of scientific information was constantly performed by the CTMFM. Once the Technical Secretariat had been set up, it proceeded to the preparation of a Work plan, which was approved in the meeting held on 16 December 1977 and was to be applied as from January 1978. Working Groups were created in accordance with the selected topics, namely, on evaluation of demersal resources, on pollution assessment, monitoring and control and on harmonization of legislations.

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\(^1\) CTMFM Press release, Montevideo, 4 February 1977.

\(^2\) Approved by the Uruguayan Government under Statute No. 15076 of 11 November 1980, enacted on 18 November 1980.