Inuit back ban on whale hunting

Fisheries Minister Roméo LeBlanc announced recently that the hunting of bowhead whales in Canadian waters had been prohibited for 1978, following a regulation adopted last year by the International Whaling Commission (IWC), of which Canada is a member.

The moratorium, which previously applied only to commercial whaling, has been extended to cover aboriginal subsistence whaling as well, with the exception of the Alaskan bowhead stock, for which a very low quota has been established.

Commercial whaling for bowhead whales has been banned in Canada since 1952 but native people have been permitted to carry on traditional whaling activities for their own use. Representatives of the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada and the Committee on Original Peoples Entitlement have agreed not to harvest any bowhead whales in 1978. The agreement will be reviewed after the IWC's 1978 annual meeting.

Law of the sea conference meets in New York

Secretary of State for External Affairs Don Jamieson, with the assistance of Justice and Transport Minister Otto Lang, and Fisheries and Environment Minister Roméo Leblanc, is leading the Canadian delegation to the resumed seventh session of the third UN Law of the Sea Conference in New York from August 21 to September 15. J. Alan Beesley, Canadian High Commissioner to Australia, is deputy head of the delegation.

This short session is continuing the work begun in Geneva last spring and is a crucial stage to the drafting of a new convention of the oceans. The last session made significant progress, chiefly on the question of seabed mining.

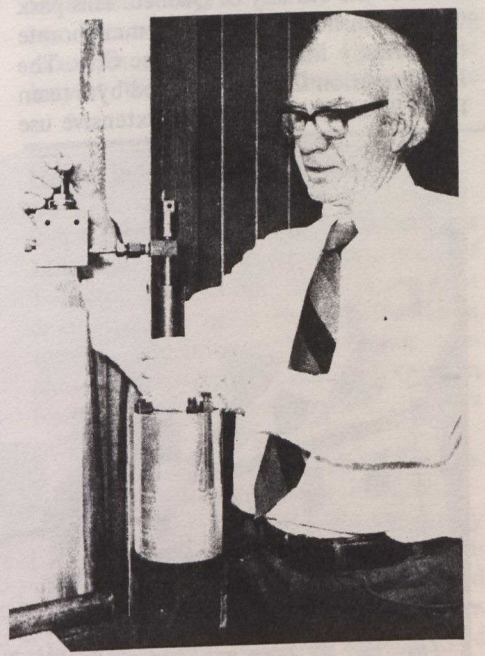
An improved text on the conservation and catching of anadromous species of fish was accepted in Geneva. The previous session also appeared to be close to a compromise on the question of the access of landlocked and geographically disadvantaged states to surplus living resources in the economic zones of the coastal states, their regions and subregions. The participants acknowledge, however, that the latter question is closely linked to that of the definition of the seaward edge of the continental margin. Discussions, in which progress was made in Geneva on other questions, such as protection of the marine environment, delimitation of maritime boundaries and settlement of disputes, are being continued in New York.

Recent progress, in addition to the results achieved in previous sessions (12-mile territorial waters, 200-mile fishing zone, special pollution control measures in the Arctic), will still have to be set down in a universally-accepted convention after the most difficult questions, in particular the question of the system of seabed mining, have been resolved.

Wood converted to heating oil

Researchers at the University of Saskatchewan have converted small quantities of aspen poplar into a heavy black liquid that resembles bunker C heating oil.

Professors R.L. Eager, J.M. Pepper and J.F. Mathews of the department of chemistry and chemical engineering, suggest that the liquid might be used as a substitute for bunker C if their efforts to find an economically feasible method of production are successful.



Dr. R.L. Eager of the University of Saskatchewan inserts a reactor containing aspen poplar, water, carbon monoxide and a catalyst into a holder which in turn will be placed into a heavy-walled stainless steel vessel for heating.

In addition, a graduate student, Hussein Zohdi, is doing a fundamental study of the chemistry involved, since the researchers have only limited knowledge of the reactions that take place.

Complex chemistry

"The wood is radically changed in the process and the basic chemistry is complex. If we understood it better, we might be able to improve the yield and quality of the fuel," they said.

At present, it has a heating value of up to 15,000 BTUs *per* pound, compared with between 8,000 and 9,000 for the original wood and 18,500 for bunker C heating oil. Bunker C, however, often contains sulphur, which contributes to pollution, whereas the liquid derived from aspen has none.

The principal advantage, the researchers say, is that aspen poplar is a renewable resource available in Western Canada in abundance. Saskatchewan has enough to allow 2.43 million tonnes to be harvested annually on a perpetual basis. However, only 5 per cent of this is being cut at present.

Furthermore, aspen's genetic make-up permits the development of fast growing hybrids, which plant breeders say might increase the annual yield by a factor of five. In addition, aspen reproduces from suckers, making it self-renewing.

The researchers state that other biomass material like wheat straw and peatmoss can be converted to a similar fuel. Saskatchewan produces several million tonnes of surplus straw annually that could be used for this purpose.

EDC helps $2-billion deal

The Export Development Corporation has approved loans, export credits and surety insurance, as well as foreign investment guarantees, totalling $1.71 billion to support prospective Canadian export sales of $2 billion to 13 countries: Algeria, Bolivia, Czechoslovakia, Egypt, India, Iran, Nigeria, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, Sweden, Singapore, the United States and Yemen.

Of the total, $1.68 billion was approved for loans and insurance in support of potential sales of $1.9 billion. The export sales that will result, if commercial sales are finalized, will create or maintain more than 70,400 man-years of employment in Canada and involve at least 130