



BACKGROUND

DOCUMENTATION

Dept. of External Affairs
Min. des Affaires extérieures

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BACKGROUND TO THE DIXON ENTRANCE DECISION

- The long-standing Canadian position is that the waters of Dixon Entrance are internal waters of Canada and that the A-B Line (established by the Alaska Boundary Tribunal of 1903) is both the land and maritime boundary in Dixon Entrance. Canada's consent to the transits to and from Behm Canal is totally consistent with its legal position on this maritime boundary.
- Canada supports the objective of improving the effectiveness of the U.S. submarine-based nuclear deterrent, which contributes to the security of the North American continent. Submarines have a crucial deterrent role in the defence of North America because they have a high degree of survivability and enormous potential retaliatory capability. Because of this, acoustic testing facilities, such as SEAFAC are vital. Scheduled to open in November 1991, it is designed to measure the acoustic "signature" of U.S. submarines, thereby helping them remain undetected while on deployment.
- Under international law, Canada has the right to control the movement of foreign government-owned vessels in its internal waters. This control can be exercised through prior consent. It is the prerogative of the coastal state to determine whether this control will be exercised by consent in each and every case, or on a general basis. In the current case, transits to and from the Behm Canal facility will be submerged. The USA will, however, provide Canada with prior notification of the commencement and duration of each operation. Given this, and the fact that the activity is beneficial to Canada, the government is providing prior blanket consent to these transits. This has not affected our position on the status of the waters of Dixon Entrance in any way.
- The submarines will transit north of Learmonth Bank and travel approximately 50 nautical miles before crossing the A-B Line. The U.S. Navy has agreed to proceed with extreme caution in Dixon Entrance, and will minimize transits during peak fishing seasons. The submarines are equipped with sophisticated electronic equipment which is capable of detecting and avoiding fishing gear.

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