



**New Brunswick fishermen:**

**The ultimate losers when governments squabble over jurisdiction and funds.**

By DAVE SIMMS

Prime minister Trudeau once suggested that Newfoundland fishermen who found it difficult to survive in the industry "should look for jobs elsewhere".

Apparently this lack of concern for the sector and those who have a complex dependency on fishing for their livelihood holds for other federal politicians.

While evidence of hardship and decline in New Brunswick's fishing industry grows, federal politicians and bureaucrats delay signing of a development sub-agreement because of jurisdictional squabbles or insufficient budgeting.

There's little question that New Brunswick's fishing industry is in trouble and that fishermen are advising their offspring to seek livelihoods in other fields - as catches decline and the value of fish lags behind increasing costs of living. The only increasing factor in the industry appears to be the number of regulations and quotas. As one Bay of Fundy fisherman said bitterly of the federal government's recently-imposed quota system aimed at shifting the herring fishery from meal to food, "they're regulating us all to hell."

Concern over the industry has prompted the provincial legislature to establish a select committee on fisheries. But while provincial bureaucrats may have the ideas, it's obvious that federal officials hold the purse strings and are willing to dole out only if they have the final say on research and development.

The province has been waiting for over two years for a fisheries development sub-agreement which would have between

six or seven million dollars—depending on which level of government you ask—spent over five years to upgrade the sector through education, research and technical development.

Ottawa and New Brunswick have signed sub-agreements since 1972 as part of the General Development Agreement aimed at promoting such sectors such as agriculture, forestry and tourism. The GDA existed side-by-side with regular federal transfer payment programs.

Programs due to be implemented under the agreement included education and technical upgrading of fishermen and an \$800,000 expenditure for incentives to entrepreneurs wishing to expand or improve their operations. Money would be spent also on the hiring and training of Francophone fisheries officials for an industry now served for the most part by experts who speak only English, despite the fact that the inshore fishermen are predominantly French-speaking.

Programs to expand foreign marketing of Maritimes fish products also were planned and a committee which would oversee the industry was proposed. The committee was to have included representatives of government, quasi-government development corporations and industrial commissions, fishermen, processors and others involved in the sector. It was hoped that all these individuals could work together to formulate policy and provide valuable insight on the implementation of development programs. It was also planned to construct a school of fisheries in the Bay of Fundy area with a sub-school near Moncton, circulate mobile classrooms, establish a "planning unit" to

organize field staff and research into methods of economizing the costs of processing and marketing.

But the fisheries sub-agreement has gone unsigned and no one seems to know why.

There's been a suggestion that political expediency has had a role. The federal minister of fisheries, Romeo LeBlanc, represents the New Brunswick riding of Kent County—the same constituency served by the Conservative provincial minister of fisheries, Omer Leger.

Mr. LeBlanc said in an interview that he finds "offensive" the suggestion that the federal fisheries department would withhold finishing the agreement because the opposing provincial government would get a share of the credit for such a program.

"If there was anything I could do for New Brunswick fishermen," he said, "I would not let political expediency stand in the way." He says this is evident because a similar sub-agreement with the Liberal government of Nova Scotia hasn't been signed either.

Officials with the Department of Regional Economic Expansion in Fredericton say the hold-up on the agreement is due to the fact that the federal fisheries department has been conducting a "full review" of its national fisheries policy for the last two years and that any proposal which they make for a sub-agreement would have to "conform" to this policy.

Some of these programs have been implemented and others are being considered, but none have been supported with federal funds.

Alan Billard, who at one time worked as a provincial fisheries officer in Buctouche, N.B., was responsible for research and development of some of the programs for the sub-agreement when work first began in the early 70's. He has a different suggestion about why the agreement is still pending. Billard said the federal government has insisted on maintaining research and development within its jurisdiction and refusing to allow the province to devise the program and use federal funding to implement these.

"The problem is that the feds say they're the ones who are supposed to look after research and development and they block provincial proposals," he said. "But the feds never get around to doing the job themselves."

He said the province was so certain that the federal government would commit funds to the sub-agreement that it started to develop programs. Billard said the federal government "let on that we could go ahead" and his work was funded under a "B" budget, one which existed in addition to the regular "A" budget consisting of the usual federal transfer payments.

Some programs were implemented and staff hired and when it became apparent that the federal government wasn't going to put up the funds, the province was

forced to pick up the tab.

The provincial fisheries minister says the expenditures "didn't hurt us that much," but there's no development of lagging regions by insufficient or unplanned. Billard gave the example of hiring a high-salaried planner to implement the programs and handle other work because the



**Leger:**

**Absence of federal 'didn't hurt us that much'**

ment wasn't signed. For some time the officer was being paid from a fund that hadn't been approved.

He described working with the federal government and attempting to resolve jurisdictional disputes which have been "bloody cloudy."

"The sadness of it all," he said, "is that many worthwhile projects aren't being done because there's no agreement."

**DREE stands**

The Brunswickan attention was drawn to the department of Regional Economic Expansion to get some idea of the progress of the negotiations of the sub-agreement. Parties to the discussions included DREE, the Community Improvement Council and both departments of fisheries.

A Brunswickan reporter in contact with Ron Williamson identified himself as a senior officer with DREE. After some discussion Williamson said he had which included his interpretation of the arguments of the CIC and the fisheries department with the director-general of his department, Chaisson. From Chaisson, it was pushed on up to the deputy-minister for the region office to the deputy minister in Ottawa and then shown to the director-general. At that point, the report was sent down the line to Mr. Williamson. Various comments, questions

## Fishermen suffer while politicians muddle sub-agreement