

The amendments to the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Convention Act contained in Bill S-13 will grant powers to Canadian officers to board the fishing vessels of other countries, and reciprocal powers whereby officers of other countries can board Canadian vessels on the high seas.

There has been a long history of fishing in the North Atlantic, stretching back over 400 years. There have been indications, especially in recent decades, of serious overfishing. In order to deal with this problem of overfishing a conference of 11 countries was convened in Washington in 1949. The International Commission for the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries was drawn up at the 1949 conference, and was signed in Washington later that year.

By 1953 the convention had been ratified by Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States. Since 1953 the Federal Republic of Germany, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Poland, Roumania and Japan, in that order, have become members of the International Commission for the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries and ICNAF is now a 15-member organization. The commission co-ordinates investigations of the fisheries off our east coast and makes recommendations to member governments for the protection and conservation of the fish stocks there. Conservation measures have already been drawn up and enforced in all five sub-areas of the North Atlantic.

It has become apparent that various measures must be undertaken. The first steps taken were to regulate the size of the mesh of nets that could be used. Then regulations were drawn up with respect to closures during periods when the fish were spawning. More recently, ICNAF has dealt with limitations of catch in particular areas. One of these areas includes Georges Bank and Browns Bank, south of Nova Scotia. There is need to extend these regulations geographically as well as in terms of gear, species, catch limits, seasons, etc.

Responsibility for enforcement of regulatory measures recommended by the International Commission, and approved by member governments, has rested with each government for its own flag vessels. As far back as the mid-1950s Canada made the suggestion to the commission that it should consider some sort of international scheme for enforcement. We need to know more about the enforcement methods of other governments. We need to be able to meet the complaints of our Canadian fishermen to the effect that the regulations which we have agreed to with other countries are not being enforced on foreign fishing vessels, particularly those that come near our shores.

On June 6, 1970, at its annual meeting at St. John's, Newfoundland, the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Commission recommended that protection officers of any contracting government be permitted to board vessels operating under the flag of another contracting government. The purpose of this recommendation was to enable our fisheries officers, for example, to examine the catches taken and the gear used by foreign vessels fishing off our coasts.

The amendments to the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Convention Act provided for in this bill will make it

N.W. Atlantic Fisheries Convention Act

possible to grant authority to Canadian officers to enforce these regulations on vessels flying the flags of other contracting governments. They will also permit the officers of other contracting governments to board Canadian fishing vessels for the same purpose.

The Canadian fishing industry, I understand, is enthusiastic about this arrangement, as are Canadian inshore fishermen, in that this will place better information in our hands and enable the regulations developed under ICNAF to be effectively policed.

I might add that Canada and the United States, by mutual agreement, have already been carrying out joint enforcement procedures. This very day, for example, Canadian patrol vessels are operating with U.S. coastguard vessels over Georges Bank and Browns Bank. Canadian officers are on U.S. coastguard vessels and, conversely, U.S. officers are on Canadian vessels, thus permitting enforcement by the vessels of either country on U.S. and Canadian flag fishing vessels. With international enforcement in effect it will no longer be necessary to have the extra officer from the other country on any given patrol vessel.

We are all concerned about overfishing. We need to establish rules in the North Atlantic fishery so that the fishery can be operated on a long-term sustained yield basis. We need rules also to make absolutely sure that Canadians get their fair share of the catch. This bill, which will allow our officers to board foreign vessels and officers of other member countries of ICNAF to do likewise with Canadian vessels, will help to ensure that this desirable state of affairs comes to pass.

Mr. Comeau: Mr. Speaker, may I ask the minister a question?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for South Western Nova (Mr. Comeau) seeks the floor for the purpose of asking a question of the minister. Is the minister prepared to answer?

Mr. Davis: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Comeau: Can the minister tell the House what areas are affected by the convention and by this bill?

Mr. Davis: I understand that all the sub-areas—in other words, the total area encompassed by the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Convention—would come under these provisions.

Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, we welcome this bill and the international convention that it ratifies, and we commend the minister for the initiative he has taken in helping to bring it about. But we regret that the government has chosen to bring in this bill just a few hours before the House is scheduled to recess for Easter, because the bill would have afforded us a unique opportunity to examine some questions of very great concern to those of us who come from the Atlantic provinces.

As a consequence of the government's strategy, we will not have that opportunity today. Hopefully, there will be other occasions before the session ends when we can