

Protection of the Marine Environment

I am sure all of you share my great concern over the continuing degradation of the marine environment. More particularly, all of us have become acutely aware that indiscriminate utilization of the sea may inflict long-lasting damage upon this environment.

In the search for new sources of food, the world has come to rely more and more on the sea and shoreline which abound in nutritious living organisms. Maritimers particularly also understand the great attraction of the sea environment for health and recreation. Oil spills or seepages from the seabed can have disastrous effects. Norms are needed to keep man's activities in, over, below or on the sea within acceptable limits. One should, however, bear in mind that the pollution of the oceans is primarily caused by land-based sources.

Protection of the marine environment from contamination has so far been discussed in two main international fora: the Intergovernmental Maritime Consultative Organization (IMCO) and the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment.

Since its inception, IMCO has administered a number of conventions aimed at regulating navigation so that it will cause as little deterioration as possible of the marine environment. Last year, the IMCO Assembly created a Marine Environment Protection Committee to underline the Organization's growing work in the environmental field.

The 1972 Stockholm Conference elaborated a Declaration on the Human Environment whose widely-accepted statement of principles may be considered as laying down the foundation for the future development of international environmental law.

A Statement of Objectives concerning the Marine Environment, which was endorsed by the Human Environment Conference, recognizes the particular interests of coastal states with respect to the management of coastal area resources.

The groundwork, therefore, seems to be sufficiently advanced for the Law of the Sea to elaborate a legal instrument pertaining to the whole realm of the marine environment. An "umbrella" treaty that would become the organic link between all existing and future instruments aimed at controlling specific sources of pollution of the marine environment.

The protection and preservation of the marine environment would embrace all sources of pollution, not only pollution from ships, but also pollution caused by seabed activities; from land-based sources; through run-offs or through the atmosphere; and that arising from the disposal of domestic and industrial wastes. Regulating the latter will of course remain within the purview of individual states.

Canada does, of course, subscribe to the idea that competent international organizations should establish appropriate, stringent standards of universal application against marine pollution.