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CANADA URGES EU TO RESPECT NAFO HALIBUT ALLOCATIONS AND NEGOTIATE OUTSTANDING ISSUES

Foreign Affairs Minister André Ouellet today urged the European Union (EU) to rescind its decision to object to the allocation by the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO) of a 1995 Greenland Halibut quota of 3 400 t to the European Union. The Minister called on the EU not to proceed with its March 1st decision to establish a unilateral quota of 18 630 t for the EU for 1995 and enjoined the EU to abide by the NAFO conservation decisions. Mr. Ouellet renewed Canada's call on the EU to agree to a meeting of senior officials from Canada and the EU to resolve this problem.

Canada considers it environmentally unsustainable for the EU to set unilaterally its own halibut quota, thereby disregarding that other NAFO members, including Canada, will fish their legitimate NAFO allocations. When added to other NAFO quotas, the EU self-allocated quota could result in the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) set by NAFO for conservation purposes being overfished by more than 50 per cent, thereby seriously damaging the stock.

Last September for the first time, NAFO decided to establish a TAC for Greenland Halibut. The TAC for 1995 is 27 000 t, compared to actual catches of 60 000 t in 1994, primarily by the EU. This limit was agreed in response to recommendations of the NAFO Scientific Council which called for strong and cautionary measures to protect the Greenland Halibut resource. Since 1989, the Scientific Council, which consists of representatives of all NAFO members, including the EU, has warned explicitly about the need to reduce catches of this stock. Despite these warnings, EU catches increased from about 2 000 t in the late 1980s to approximately 45 000 t in each of the last three years.

Minister Ouellet concluded: "Unless the EU respects the NAFO quota, Canada will have no alternative but to act."

- 30 -

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