

One of my objectives during my visit to Europe is to bring to the attention of Europeans the serious over-fishing of cod and other groundfish by fleets from EC countries operating in international waters off Newfoundland.

The Northwest Atlantic fishery is one of the world's premier renewable resources. Those resources were severely depleted by European and Asian fleets from the 1950's to the 1970's.

In 1979, twelve Atlantic fishing nations formed NAFO, the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization, to ensure good conservation and responsible management of fisheries resources in international waters in the Northwest Atlantic.

Toward this end, NAFO reduced catches to allow regeneration of depleted fish stocks and to provide for a long-term sustainable fishery. Until 1986, there was a genuine and often painful commitment by all NAFO members to the conservation and management measures adopted by that organization.

However, since 1986 and the accession of Spain and Portugal, the EC has broken with this policy of support and adherence to NAFO decisions. Since 1986, while NAFO-set quotas for the EC have totalled 78,200 tonnes, the EC has harvested considerably more than 410,000 tonnes of fish from the Northwest Atlantic.

Excessive catches by Spain and Portugal are part of the problem, but so is their harvesting of immature fish. A recent random sample of flatfish in the hold of a Spanish trawler yielded 275 fish weighing 51 kilograms. The average weight of those fish was 187 grams. Their average length was 17 centimeters. This sort of harvesting can be disastrous for the future.

Overfishing in the Northwest Atlantic is damaging an important world resource, harming Canadian fishermen, harming fishermen from other NAFO member states and, ultimately, harming European fishermen.

This is really a problem of sustainable development, which the Brundtland Commission defined as:

"development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

Through the actions of Spanish and Portuguese fleets, the EC is compromising the ability of present, as well as future, generations to harvest these fisheries resources in a sustainable way.