Most also accepted that conferences remained a fact of today's environment, and that this situation could improve only gradually with the evolution of international shipping services.

Improving industry-government liaison and response

All seminars identified an urgent requirement to establish a formal channel for Canadian trade interests to use when restrictive shipping related practices are encountered. Many shippers expressed a feeling of helplessness in their inability to dialogue in a meaningful way with government run shipping lines, or indeed the officials of other governments responsible for the administration of shipping policy. Some noted a similar feeling of frustration in attempts to communicate with foreign based shipping conferences. (Toronto) Most exporters accepted the reality of increased government intervention in international shipping today, thus acknowledging the need for government-government contract to facilitate trade and resolve problems when necessary. Some noted that it was difficult to identify who to communicate with in the government of Canada when disputes involving international distribution are encountered, and stressed the need for timely access to senior decision-making levels in government when problems arise (Montreal). This matter was given further review and a consensus recorded to the effect that **day-to-day complaints arising from the trade community should be registered by forwarding these to the International Trade Branch of the Department of External Affairs**. In seeking a solution, that department would be expected to liaise, for example, on shipping related matters, through existing inter-departmental channels with **Transport Canada** and the new **National Transportation Agency**.

Several workshops noted that the need for mechanisms to react in the event of foreign intervention in shipping markets had been a recommendation of the **Task Force on Deep-Sea Shipping** tabled in April 1985.

Seminar participants universally supported this recommendation and its corollary to the effect that, given changes in the structure and behaviour of international shipping, modifications to current Canadian policy would be required. Such changes as appropriate should be the subject of review by industry and government, and all workshops concluded that **paramount importance should be attached to establishing an industry-government advisory board** for this purpose. The Montreal seminar concluded that the Board should comprise only trade interests. The chairman of that seminar, however, in his concluding statement at the National Conference, noted that in the light of these latter discussions he was prepared to concede the need for carrier participation.

It was thought that the multifaceted nature of trade and shipping would require diverse representation from affected industries on the Advisory Board. One workshop (Vancouver) specifically recommended that nominations to the Board should be from the industry concerned, and that appointments should be based on individual knowledge and performance, rather than political persuasion. The Vancouver chairman endorsed Recommendation IV of the Task Force Report in his summary, and in describing the purpose of the proposed Board, quoted from page 57 of that report:

> "Canada should strengthen its capacity to respond quickly and efficiently to any threats and impediments to trade, manifest in protectionist shipping policies and practices. Such responses by Canada often need to be on a case-by-case basis where time is of the essence. The various Ministers having a direct interest in these questions need to develop an ability to respond with a concerted approach in a very short time period which in some cases could be a matter of days or in extreme situations, hours."

The case for pragmatic flexibility — the art of the possible

Seminar participants examined in detail several alternative policy approaches Canada might utilize when restrictive shipping practices are imposed by another country and are detrimental to Canadian trade. These alternative approaches included: