

I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to so many representatives of the Atlantic fishery about some important international matters. Tomorrow, my colleague, the Honourable Tom Siddon, will speak to you about the overall situation of the Atlantic fishery. On the overall situation, let me say only a few words.

As a Minister from Atlantic Canada and a member of the Cabinet Committee on Northern Cod, I recognize the very serious problems facing the fishing industry. Those problems relate to the resource, to overcapacity in harvesting and processing and to chronically low incomes for many fishermen and plant workers. All these must be addressed to achieve lasting solutions for the Atlantic fishery.

To do justice to this serious and complex situation, the government decided that, in addition to the usual process for groundfish management, three special task forces were needed. The first, chaired by Dr. Leslie Harris, is intensively studying the 2J3KL cod stock. The second, headed by Mr. Ken Stein, is working up comprehensive proposals in response to Dr. Harris's advice. And the third, headed up by Mr. Jean Haché, has reviewed the difficult situation in Scotia-Fundy.

The work of these three special task forces feeds into the Cabinet Committee on Northern Cod, chaired by the Right Honourable Joe Clark. There, consideration of work plans and interim reports will soon be replaced by consideration of final reports and recommendations for action. That will be when the Government of Canada makes its decisions for the fishery for 1990 and beyond.

Turning to international matters, the first topic I want to deal with is market access. Canada's largest and most important market for seafood products is the United States. Access to that market is governed principally by the Free Trade Agreement.

One major benefit of the Free Trade Agreement is the elimination, over the phase-in period, of all tariffs. This will help boost secondary processing in Canada, which has been restricted by tariffs as high as 17.5 per cent on processed seafood products.

A second major benefit is the right to appeal any countervailing or anti-dumping duties to a binational panel for quick and impartial resolution. It is a procedure that we hope not to have to use often, but it is important to have it available should the need arise.