

News Release

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CANADA EXPRESSES GRAVE CONCERN OVER EU FAILURE TO CONCLUDE FISHERIES AGREEMENT

The ambassadors to Canada of the European Union, France and Spain were called in to the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade today to receive Canada's strong protest over the EU's failure to conclude an agreement in the Greenland halibut overfishing dispute. The ambassadors were informed that unless Spanish vessels cease fishing, Canada will resume its enforcement actions on the Grand Banks off the coast of Newfoundland.

Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Gordon Smith told the ambassadors that Canada's patience is exhausted. Mr. Smith noted that a fair deal to end this dispute, negotiated by Canada and the European Commission, has been on the table for almost 10 days.

Mr. Smith pointed out that Canada has waited through a fisheries ministers' meeting, a foreign affairs ministers' meeting, a European Commission meeting, and two full days of meetings of the permanent representatives committee of the EU. Canada has gone the extra mile to try to achieve an agreement of benefit for both sides, and each time Canada's goodwill and restraint have been met with new demands and continued intransigence. He said the French presidency of the EU outlined to Canada what was required in the way of further offers to conclude an agreement. Canada delivered, but in the end the EU was unable to deliver its side of the agreement.

Mr. Smith told the ambassadors that Canada's commitment to conservation remains firm. Canada, he said, will not negotiate endlessly, while EU vessels continue aggressively and provocatively to fish what little is left of the Greenland halibut stock. He indicated that the EU should not interpret Canadian willingness to seek a negotiated settlement as a lack of determination to solve the problem. Unless fishing is halted, he said, Canada is left with no alternative but to resume its enforcement activities.



Finally, the Deputy Minister noted that British and Irish naval vessels have taken action against Spanish trawlers, and evidence is emerging of illegal acts by those trawlers. He said Spain should consider the tremendous concern that is being expressed around the world about its fishing fleets.

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