



news release

Date September 4, 1990

NO. 188

For release

ST. JOHN'S CONFERENCE SEEKS LEGAL SOLUTIONS TO
HIGH SEAS OVERFISHING

**St. John's Conference on the Conservation and Management
of Living Resources of the High Seas**

September 4, 1990 - Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Right Honourable Joe Clark, International Trade Minister John Crosbie, and Fisheries and Oceans Minister Bernard Valcourt today announced the opening of the Conference on the Conservation and Management of Living Resources of the High Seas being held in St. John's, Newfoundland from September 5 to 7, 1990.

International legal and scientific experts attending the St. John's Conference will examine problems relating to high seas fisheries in light of the principles for conservation and management of these resources in the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. The "high seas" includes the area outside the 200 mile zone which is not under coastal state jurisdiction.

Problems relating to the management of straddling stocks and highly migratory species, and harmful practices such as driftnet fishing are major topics for the Conference. "Straddling stocks" are fish stocks that occur both inside and outside the 200 mile limit, and which are therefore vulnerable to overfishing on the high seas.

"The goal of effective conservation and resource management in fisheries outside 200 miles is embodied in the principles of international conduct set out in the U.N. Law of the Sea Convention," said Mr. Crosbie. "Canada has taken up the challenge of striving for international acceptance of the practical measures needed to make the U.N. Law of the Sea Convention work as it was intended. Increased international understanding and co-operation is vital if we are to succeed in this and thereby achieve effective conservation and resource management of fisheries on the high seas."

The U.N. Law of the Sea Convention calls for the establishment of regional (international) organizations to conserve and manage straddling stocks. For Canada's Atlantic coast, the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO) is the regional organization established in accordance with the U.N. Law of the Sea Convention.

"Canada is unique among the world's coastal states in the degree of harm suffered by our fishermen because of overfishing of straddling stocks outside 200 miles," said Mr. Valcourt.

"Adherence by all states to conservation and management decisions taken by NAFO is needed to give effect to the principles in the U.N. Law of the Sea Convention and thereby end overfishing on the high seas off Canada's Atlantic coast."

At the Houston Economic Summit meeting held in July, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney spearheaded the adoption by the leaders of the seven major industrial countries of a call for international co-operation in conservation of living marine resources, recognition of the importance of regional fisheries organizations (like NAFO) and respect for conservation regimes.

During the recent visit to Canada of Soviet Fisheries Minister N. Kotlyar, he and Mr. Valcourt issued a joint statement of both countries' commitment to the effective operation of regional fisheries organizations (like NAFO) in the conservation and management of straddling stocks.

Canada took a leading role in the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly, in December 1989, of a resolution calling for the cessation of large scale pelagic driftnet fishing in the Pacific Ocean and other area of the high seas.

"Canada shares the global concern with the destructive effects of driftnet fishing," said Mr. Valcourt. "Large scale driftnet fishing is a highly indiscriminate and wasteful fishing method, that threatens effective conservation of fish stocks, as well as birds and marine mammals."

"Canada has pursued many initiatives, in terms of direct appeals to world leaders, raising public awareness internationally and in the development of international law to put an end to non-sustainable fisheries practices," said Mr. Clark. "The St. John's Conference, by itself, cannot provide solutions. It can however, add to the climate of increased international awareness and co-operation that is needed to provide lasting solutions to these serious problems."

The St. John's Conference is being chaired by Canada's Ambassador for Marine Conservation, J. Alan Beesley who led the Canadian delegation to the Law of the Sea Convention and chaired the Convention Drafting Committee. Amongst the St. John's Conference participants are such leading international experts as Mr. Satya N. Nandan, U.N. Under-Secretary General and Special Representative of the Secretary General for the Law of the Sea, and Dr. Lee Alverson, President of Natural Resources Consultants and a member of the Independent Review of the State of the Northern Cod Stock, chaired by Dr. Leslie Harris.

The Conference will be held at the Newfoundland and Labrador Institute of Fisheries and Marine Technology, 155 Ridge Road, St. John's.

Please refer to additional background material.

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