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CANADA'S FISHERIES POLICY
AND THE ICNAF MEETING

A PROGRESS REPORT
BY THE HONOURABLE
ALLAN J. MACEACHEN,
M.P. FOR CAPE BRETON
HIGHLANDS-CANSO AND
SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

-- PORT HAWKESBURY (Nova Scotia) SEPTEMBER 13 -- The Honourable Allan J. MacEachen announced today that the Canadian Government would intensify in coming weeks high-level consultations with countries with fishing fleets in the North Atlantic Ocean. These consultations, which began almost immediately after the regular meeting of the International Commission for Northwest Atlantic Fisheries (ICNAF) in Edinburgh, last June, seek to ensure that the special meeting of the Commission to be held in Montreal September 22-28 will lead to concrete results -- results which will bring about a reduction in foreign fishing efforts, the enforcement of appropriate regulations for the maintenance or rebuilding of stocks and, consequently, an improvement in the long-term economic prospects of Atlantic Canada's fishing industry.

"Even if the outcome of the Edinburgh meeting was disappointing, the goals of the Canadian Government remain the same," Mr. MacEachen emphasized. "Both my officials and those of my colleague, the Honourable Roméo LeBlanc, have impressed upon the representatives of foreign fishing nations the urgent need for a 40% reduction of foreign fishing efforts, reduction of allowable catch limits for stocks in critical condition, and increased allocations to Canada, within conservation limits where there is a demonstrable capacity and need.

The M. P. for Cape Breton Highlands-Canso pointed out that the discussions held with representatives of the Soviet Government in late August, after the temporary closure of East-Coast ports to the Soviet fishing fleets, had led to some progress: "at least enough to reach an agreement on specific procedures concerning the enforcement of fishing quotas, coupled with the re-opening of our ports, when and only when we are satisfied that these procedures are working effectively".

"The discussions we had with Spain and Portugal have also been encouraging," the Minister went on to say, "and we expect to have similar consultations before the Montreal ICNAF meeting with fisheries officials from other member states such as the United States, Norway, Poland and the Federal Republic of Germany.

The Federal Minister pointed out that this series of meetings, prepared and conducted in "very close co-operation" by the Department of External Affairs and the Department of Environment (Fisheries), had proven quite effective in emphasizing the seriousness of Canada's concern over the resource crisis in the North Atlantic and the very real economic difficulties which Canadian fishermen are facing as a result of continuing and persistent overfishing by

foreign fleets. "Foreign governments are beginning to realize that Canada is determined that fisheries management measures in the Northwest Atlantic be effective and this requires both a reduction in foreign fishing effort and other stringent conservation actions," said Mr. MacEachen. "They are also beginning to realize that while vital Canadian interests are at stake, a permanent depletion of North Atlantic fisheries due to present practices would be detrimental to all countries and might well impair the world's ability to feed its growing population in the next century."

Mr. MacEachen emphasized that in the long run, this danger could most effectively be averted by a new deal on the Law of the Sea which would extend the fishing jurisdiction of coastal states to 200 miles. This would place most of the Northwest Atlantic fishing banks under Canadian management. "We have the experts, we have the means and we have the will to manage this great resource effectively and fairly -- not in a narrow and selfish way, but in the interest of the international community," Mr. MacEachen noted. "All we lack is the jurisdiction and that, too, we are determined to get."

"But for very substantial and practical reasons, we would much prefer to get the required extension of our fisheries jurisdiction through an international agreement on the Law of the Sea, as part of a "package deal" which would bring many other benefits of considerable significance for Atlantic Canada. The international process which was started at Caracas and was pursued at Geneva earlier this year is lengthy and complex, sometimes tedious and frustrating. But we are sufficiently encouraged by the progress accomplished so far -- especially the emergence of a single negotiating text which goes far to meet Canada's objectives -- to wait for a while longer before contemplating unilateral action."

But Mr. MacEachen stressed that the Canadian Government would not and could not await developments on the legal front before tackling the immediate problems of the fishing industry. Of course, since the end of the Geneva conference, contingency plans were being prepared to extend Canada's fisheries jurisdiction by other means, if and when it becomes necessary. But there is another forum where pressure could be brought to bear upon fishing nations immediately and where action was possible: ICNAF. "The position we took at the Edinburgh meeting was firm but reasonable," claimed Mr. MacEachen; "in any case it was the only position we could take. We were willing to negotiate arrangements acceptable to other members, but we were not willing to yield on the

essentials and we did not. We had no illusion that we could achieve all of our objectives at one ICNAF meeting; but then, the initiative we took at ICNAF was not a shot in the dark. It was part of a strategy which my officials together with Mr. LeBlanc's, began to plan even before the close of the Geneva conference."

Mr. MacEachen then recalled some of the initiatives which followed the Edinburgh meeting:

-- The temporary closing of East-Coast ports to Soviet fleets on July 28, and the presentation of an aide-mémoire to the USSR Government in Moscow and Ottawa to justify the Canadian decision.

-- A personal letter from Prime Minister Trudeau to USSR Premier Alexis Kosygin, explaining the reasons for this move and enlisting his co-operation in resolving the dispute; and the subsequent meeting between Mr. Trudeau and Secretary-General Brezhnev, in Helsinki, which resulted in new instructions being given to officials.

-- The meeting in Ottawa, from August 25 to August 27, of Canadian and Soviet delegations at which Soviet representatives recognized it was imperative to ensure strict adherence to and implementation of measures agreed within ICNAF, particularly in light of the urgent need to maintain and restore the stocks.

-- An agreement at this Canadian-Soviet meeting to establish a Joint Fisheries Consultative Commission with the following functions:

- a) to review problems referred to it by the two governments regarding the implementation of agreed measures, and to make recommendations for the resolution of such problems;
- b) to facilitate the co-ordination of statistical and scientific information;
- c) to improve bilateral co-operation under the ICNAF Scheme of Joint International Enforcement;
- d) to provide for an improved exchange of information with regard to areas of concentration of fishing operations of both countries and promote other co-operative measures for the purpose of preventing damage to fishing gear and of facilitating the settlement of any claims arising from such damage.

-- A meeting of Spanish and Canadian delegations, on August 6 and 7, at which it was agreed that steps would be taken to enable Spanish fisheries inspectors to work with Canadian inspectors in securing improved compliance with ICNAF regulations and that a new system of rapid communication between Canadian and Spanish officials will be put into operation to deal with possible violations. Spain will also give early consideration to the designation of a Spanish authority in the Northwest Atlantic with whom Canadian fisheries officials will be able to deal on a day-to-day basis with regard to enforcement questions and other related matters.

-- A meeting of Portuguese and Canadian delegations on September 4 and 5, at which Portuguese officials indicated, among other things, that they were taking measures to improve their fishing vessel log-books to bring about a fuller reporting of discarded by-catches, and that they would be intensifying their sampling programme to improve the assessment of the state of the stocks and the yields they can support. The Portuguese delegation also announced the intention of their Government to designate in the near future a Portuguese fisheries official stationed in St. John's, Newfoundland, who would deal directly with Canadian fisheries authorities on a day-to-day basis with regard to the implementation of conservation measures, their enforcement and other related matters.

-- Consultations with provincial ministers and officials as well as representatives of the fishing industry to seek their advice on and enlist their support of the federal government's strategy.

-- A meeting of the Secretary of State for External Affairs with the Ambassadors of all ICNAF countries in Ottawa, on September 2, at which an aide-mémoire stating Canada's position and requesting their co-operation was handed to them, while Canadian embassies abroad were simultaneously presenting the same document to the governments involved.

"These limited understandings are only a beginning, but at least they are a beginning," Mr. MacEachen continued. "We do not expect miracles from the discussions with other countries which will take place before the Montreal ICNAF meeting; but we expect that they will lead, at the very least, to similar understandings on some of the key issues. I am hopeful that, as a result of these intensive consultations, agreement on the Canadian proposals can be reached at the ICNAF meeting."

The Federal Minister then noted that the most significant outcome of the meetings with the USSR, Spain and Portugal was the willingness of all three to sit down now to work out the terms and conditions governing continued fishing by their fleets in waters off Canada's coasts in the light of anticipated legal and jurisdictional changes, i.e., the establishment of an extended Canadian fishing zone.

The presentation of the Canadian case had been based on the assumption that Canada's fishing jurisdiction will inevitably be extended to 200 miles, one way or another; and foreign officials appeared to accept this assumption. "They know it's coming and they know that, before long, offshore fishing fleets will need, in the law as well as in fact, the co-operation of Canada to operate in the Northwest Atlantic," said Mr. MacEachen.

In conclusion, the Secretary of State for External Affairs cautioned that, even if Canada has some real clout in the matter, it is important and very much in the interest of the Atlantic Provinces that Canadian goals be achieved and foreign governments dealt with, whenever possible, in such a way that longer-term international co-operation in fisheries will not be compromised.

"The higher the Canadian catch, the more important it will be for us to have secure markets abroad; and many of these markets are to be found in the countries whose fleets are fishing in the waters off our coasts, because their population eats more fish than Canadians do," said Mr. MacEachen.

"There are several other reasons why we should ensure that it will be politically feasible, in the future, to expand co-operation with other fishing nations," the Nova Scotia Minister went on to say. "Access to technology might be one of them, for we all know that some of the foreign fishermen off our coasts are pretty efficient. Could it not be to our advantage, some day, to negotiate joint ventures with them?"