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STATEMENT BY

THE MINISTER FOR INTERNATIONAL TRADE

JOHN C. CROSBIE

ON

FURTHER STEPS AGAINST FOREIGN OVERFISHING

ST. JOHN'S, NEWFOUNDLAND
October 6, 1989.

From the 1950s to the 1970s, foreign fleets inflicted massive damage on fisheries resources off Canada's Atlantic coast. Canada seized the opportunity then before us and played a critical role in creating the international legal basis for the 200-mile zone under the Law of the Sea.

In that great effort, Canada was represented by an outstanding team, led by one of our most accomplished diplomats and international jurists, Mr. Alan Beesley. Canada has need once more of his skills and determination on these matters.

I am pleased and proud to announce today that, on a recommendation from the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Right Honourable Joe Clark, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, the Honourable Tom Siddon, and myself, the Prime Minister has created a senior position in the Government of Canada, Ambassador for Marine Conservation, and has appointed Mr. Alan Beesley to that new position.

Mr. Beesley's mandate will be to marshal the resources of the Government of Canada, in cooperation with provincial governments and representatives of the industry and fishermen, toward the goal of ending foreign overfishing.

In this task, Mr. Beesley will report directly to Mr. Clark, Mr. Siddon and myself. He will draw on all the talent and resources that he needs from the Departments of External Affairs and International Trade and Fisheries and Oceans. He will combine these duties with another important and related function, that of Special Advisor on Environmental Affairs to Mr. Clark.

Mr. Beesley is undertaking his new duties at a critical time. While the level of overfishing by foreign fleets outside 200 miles is far less than the levels that took place outside 12 miles in the 1960s and early 1970s, nonetheless current levels of foreign overfishing are damaging fish stocks of importance to Canada.

As an example, I would note the precipitous declines in total allowable catches (TAC's) for flatfish on the Southern Grand Banks. The quotas set by NAFO for the three major flatfish stocks in this area totalled 75,000 tonnes in 1986. For 1990, the total of the TAC's for these stocks is only 34,900 tonnes. That is a reduction of more than 50 per cent in only four years.

These declines are caused not only by the taking of excessive tonnages, but by the massive harvesting of immature fish. For example, a random sample of flatfish recently found in the hold of a Spanish trawler yielded a total weight of 113 pounds for 275 fish. The average weight of these fish was 6.6 ounces and their average length was 6.8 inches.

Many thousands of tonnes of such fish are taken annually by vessels from Spain and Portugal in a recognized nursery area outside 200 miles. This is grossly irresponsible conduct.

At the outset of the recent NAFO meeting, it seemed that the European Community was about to take a different approach. EC Fisheries Commissioner Manuel Marin spoke about a commitment to conservation, but during the NAFO meetings the EC did not deliver on that commitment.

We will press them to do so, particularly during this fall, when they will make two decisions: first, whether or not to object to NAFO-set quotas; and second, if the EC does object a decision on the level of quotas that the EC sets for itself in the Northwest Atlantic for 1990.

We will, through a public information campaign in Europe, seek to hold up a mirror before European decision-makers to show the inconsistency of what Spain and Portugal have done compared to what the EC says it is committed to doing. The essence of the public information campaign is to show Europeans something about themselves that very few of them know, the irresponsibility and destructiveness of their fishing activities in the Northwest Atlantic.

This effort will be undertaken in consultation with provincial governments and in co-operation with the fishing industry and the fishermen's union. It will involve them and Mr. Beesley in a variety of activities in Europe.

It will involve our embassies in all the capitals of the European Community. And, it will involve further activities by other Canadian Ministers, all of which will be announced as we proceed.

We will be targetting key decision-makers in the European Community and its member states, as well as influential journalists and commentators.

We have three simple and important messages:

- First, the EC is the main impediment to the proper operation of an important international conservation and resource management organization, NAFO.

- Second, the effects of excessive fishing by the EC in the Northwest Atlantic are damaging an important resource, harming fishermen in Canada, in other NAFO member states and, ultimately, harming their own fishermen.
- Third, the commitment of all responsible nations to the principles of sustainable development is being flouted by the EC, both in terms of the excessive levels of their catches and their targetting of juvenile fish in recognized nursery areas.

I will begin this campaign through a series of contacts with and appearances before key European journalists in London in the coming week.

I will continue these efforts with the European media and also meet with responsible ministers in France and the Federal Republic of Germany. This continues the high level political contacts initiated this year by the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for External Affairs and the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and myself. These meetings will take place during the course of a trade mission that I will be leading to France and the Federal Republic of Germany.

These initiatives, involving the public information campaign in Europe and Ministerial contacts with the EC and its member states, reinforce the measures that Canada is continuing to take against foreign overfishing. These measures include the closure of ports, the denial of quotas for surplus stocks and the denial of participation in joint ventures such as selected over-the-side sales enforced against fleets from states that fail to adhere to NAFO conservation decisions.

Canada approaches all of these matters bearing in mind our rights as the coastal state and the obligations of states operating distant water fleets, as provided for under Part VII of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

The Law of the Sea does not now provide the legal basis for us unilaterally to extend Canada's exclusive fisheries zone beyond 200 miles. In the jargon of the Law of the Sea, the area beyond 200 miles remains the "high seas".

However, the Law of the Sea does contain important precepts calling on the coastal state and states operating distant water fleets to cooperate toward the goal of conservation and responsible resource management of fish stocks that straddle the 200-mile zone. Canada will continue to seek to have that international legal framework under the Law of the Sea work through NAFO.

If the existing international framework cannot be made to work in spite of our best efforts, then Canada will be seeking to achieve acceptance by the international community of nations of a more clear and effective set of rules for this purpose.

That, while a longer term and by no means certain undertaking, is an important part of Ambassador Beesley's new responsibilities.

In conclusion, let me reiterate the two developments I have announced today:

- First, the appointment of Alan Beesley as Ambassador for Marine Conservation, with responsibility for co-ordinating Canada's efforts toward ending foreign overfishing.
- Second, Canada's public information campaign, which I will begin next week in London, to press the European Community to correct their conduct outside 200 miles which is irresponsible internationally and damaging to all nations that rely on the resource. It is also contrary to the EC's commitment to sustainable development.

For the Prime Minister, myself, Joe Clark, Tom Siddon and the Government of Canada, ending the threat of foreign overfishing is and will continue to be a national priority.