

# Statement

Secretary of  
State for  
External Affairs



# Déclaration

Secrétaire d'État  
aux Affaires  
extérieures

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AS DELIVERED

**AN ADDRESS BY**

**THE HONOURABLE BARBARA McDOUGALL,**

**SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,**

**AT THE MEETINGS OF**

**THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAM**

**TO THE**

**CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY PANEL OF EXPERTS**

**MONTREAL, Quebec  
March 18, 1993**

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

It is always a pleasure to welcome international meetings to Canada, but it is a particular pleasure to welcome this one. We are proud of the leading role that Canada has taken to advance the Convention on Biological Diversity during the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) process. We are also glad that we now have the opportunity to build on that success by hosting your discussions here in Montreal.

This city, in fact, is a very appropriate place for these meetings -- and not just because Montreal is an accomplished host and a city with a truly international outlook. It was the wealth of biological riches that built this city. Furs, agriculture and forest products contributed to the building of this city and this country -- a process that continues today. Montreal's economic base now includes a major pharmaceutical sector, which is also linked to our biological wealth.

What is true in Montreal is also the case in community after community across this country. While we support the work to maintain biological diversity for its intrinsic value, it is not simply a matter of altruism and scientific concern. It is also a matter of economics. It is a matter of jobs. Biodiversity creates tangible benefits for people. That reality reinforces the position that we have taken on the issues of biodiversity.

This evening, I would like to make the economic case for biodiversity. Some object to basing the case for biological diversity on the calculus of jobs and income. I disagree. From my perspective, biodiversity is too often a subject for debate among the already convinced. To broaden understanding and support, it will be vital to underline the relationship between continued biodiversity and the increased economic health of mankind.

The history of Canadian economic life is a history drawn from our biological riches. Although our economy is now highly industrialized and has a massive service sector, we remain tied to our biological resources for a high proportion of our wealth.

Seventy billion Canadian dollars per year: that was the dollar value of the benefits realized by Canadians from our biological resources, according to one federal government study. That \$70 billion is calculated from a wide variety of factors, but the point is clear. Biodiversity underpins our economic well-being in ways both large and small.

For example, wildlife activities in Canada contribute \$6.5 billion to our gross domestic product, but without biological diversity and necessary habitats, much of that income would disappear. Jobs would become extinct and the potential for many more in the future would disappear.

There are new industries developing that depend on the preservation of our biological heritage. In Canada, we know that the international image of Canada is tied to our natural heritage. People as near to us as the United States come to Canada in the expectation of finding an unspoiled, natural paradise long gone in their own countries. In response, Canada has a rapidly growing ecotourism industry with a value of over half a billion dollars already.

The growth of this industry is one of the ways in which we can place a tangible value on biological diversity, especially in regions where people need new sources of employment.

A fundamental aspect of our approach to UNCED was that linkage between our environmental concerns and their economic implications.

The proof is as near as our Atlantic coast. Those waters have been fished continually for over five hundred years. This year, virtually no one fishes there. We have placed a moratorium on fishing for Northern Cod over much of our East Coast. We have done so to allow the species to replenish its numbers. We have had to take this action because the risk of destroying a major ecosystem was so great.

That is an ecosystem that includes people. As a result of the crisis in the Northern Cod fishery, approximately 20,000 Canadian fishermen and plant workers are unemployed. Thousands of others in the region have also been affected. More than 400 communities depend on that resource, and they have learned first-hand the importance of maintaining biologically healthy, natural regions. They have come to understand that biological resources have to be maintained for the long term.

This situation did not occur overnight. The warning signs were evident. We worked to prevent this crisis by domestic and international means. One of the major focuses of our work was to stop the indiscriminate overfishing of the waters beyond Canada's 200-mile limit.

We went to UNCED determined to see order brought to the high seas. In the end, with the active support of dozens of other countries, we succeeded in including a commitment to an international conference with a view to implementing the Law of the Sea Convention provisions on straddling and highly migratory fish stocks in Agenda 21. We want a management regime based on sustainable development, not short-term thinking. We want a management regime that ensures sustainable jobs and a healthy ecosystem.

Through negotiations, we are on the way to that result. However, thousands of people in Canada and in other fishing countries face uncertainty, because our beneficial long-term relationship with a healthy ecosystem was not respected.

The Grand Banks of Newfoundland, that incredibly fertile ocean region, may yet regain its former vigour. Its biological diversity may yet rebound, but now it serves as a stark example of how the abuse of productive ecosystems cannot be sustained for long. It underlines that our long-term economic health is tied to our stewardship of the environment.

That link between productive ecosystems, economic benefits and stewardship is no less true in Canadian forests.

Forests cover half of Canada's land mass and they account for some 10 per cent of the world's forests. Our forest industry contributes \$20 billion to our gross domestic product. It is an industry that has made great strides in improving its practices to lessen its environmental impact. Long gone are the days when entire forests in Canada were cut down with no thought to the future. We wish that that were true everywhere.

At UNCED, we achieved a Statement of Principles on forests after a long and difficult debate. That Statement is grounded in the belief that the careful use of forests provides a continual regeneration of jobs and prosperity.

In Canada, there are approximately 350 communities that are dependent on forests. Some 670,000 jobs exist because of the forest industry. Those jobs depend on maintaining healthy forests. The people who work in our forests understand that maintaining biological diversity is not simply about general benefits. It is not just about intrinsic values. It is about maintaining jobs and communities over the long term.

Governments across Canada and the forest industry itself are committed to ensuring that the richness of our forests remains part of our heritage forever. We are taking steps to work with other countries, through our Model Forests Program, to improve forest management processes so that they too might reap the same benefits.

I should note that the benefits are often far more than just lumber or paper. One of the best examples comes from our own Pacific coast.

The Western Yew was traditionally an unwanted tree species in our forest industry, because it does not grow very tall and its trunk tends to twist. However, we now find that its bark has a compound, Taxol, that appears to be an important agent in fighting cancer of the breast, ovaries and lungs.

Suddenly, this tree has gone from being virtually worthless to being extremely valuable in economic terms in a matter of months.

Some environmentalists blanch at the thought of using economic tools to encourage the maintenance of biological diversity. In ignoring self-interest, they ignore one of the most powerful tools for good. Their belief in the power of altruism is not misplaced, but most ecosystems will not be saved by altruism alone.

Through finding means of ensuring that people, communities and states have reasonable and legitimate means of owning and benefiting from the economic potential of their ecosystems, we can do a great deal to save biological diversity. Recognition of that fact is a major strong point of the Convention.

We believe that, if biodiversity is to be maintained, people must recognize their stake in it. If that stake is the expectation of ongoing economic benefit, then we may find even more success than through well-meant international commitments.

We need tools that underscore an important fact. Maintenance of biological diversity is critical to the economic health of human beings. We cannot replace all that nature provides for free. We cannot understand the complex web of species relationships that we count on for our daily bread. We cannot assume that people will do what is necessary to preserve diversity, unless we show them how they too will gain.

I recognize that economics is not the only tool available in achieving our goal of maintained biological diversity, but the most significant result of UNCED was the linkage between our environmental needs and our economic ones.

People genuinely understand that they are part of a much larger web of species. The essence of sustainable development is no different in Montreal than it is in a rain forest village. We need to see our ecosystems and their resources in a way that permits long-term use, as appropriate, and long-term stability.

We must encourage people to understand their long-term stake in biodiversity, and we must encourage them to maintain that diversity.

I wish you all the best in your discussions over the next few days. I am pleased that Canada continues to play such a leading role in this process, and we extend our commitment to continue to do so.

Thank you.