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MARINE POLLUTION: INTERGOVERNMENTAL MEETING IN OTTAWA
PREPARED FOR UN CONFERENCE ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
MINISTÈRE DES AFFAIRES EXTÉRIEURES

When Thor Heyderdahl drifted across the Atlantic in his papyrus boat from Safi, Morocco, to Barbados in the West Indies, the voyage took 57 days. During 43 of those days, he saw lumps of oil ranging in size from a pea to an apple and oil slicks that changed the water from blue to opaque. There were days when the water was filled with so many lumps and with oily matter that the crew could not even wash.

This was man's work thousands of miles beyond the national coastlines and probably the result of dumping by tankers. But man pollutes the oceans in many ways, mainly by what he does on land. The automobile he drives belches heavy metals into the air; factories pour wastes into streams and rivers; farmers and public health officials spray persistent chemicals into the air. All this, together with some half a million chemical compounds created by man to meet a variety of his needs end up, for the most part, in the seas where they concentrate in the food chain.

This pollution of the oceans can have a lethal effect on many forms of marine life, and ultimately can harm man himself.

In order to deal with the urgent problems of marine pollution in a systematic way, the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, which meets in Stockholm next June, will propose to the nations of the world a comprehensive approach for protection of the oceans, that 70 per cent of the biosphere on which all life depends. In preparation for Stockholm, an Intergovernmental Working Group will meet in Ottawa November 8 - 12 to consider specific measures for presentation to the Conference. Representatives from more than 20 countries are expected to attend the meeting. The provisional agenda includes:

1. General Guidelines and Principles for the Preservation of the Marine Environment;
2. Constituent Elements of a Comprehensive Plan to Preserve the Marine Environment;
3. Consideration of a Draft Convention for the Regulation of Transport for Ocean Dumping.

The Hon. Jack Davis, Minister of the Environment for Canada, and Maurice F. Strong, Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment will address the opening session of the meeting.

The Intergovernmental Working Group first met in London last June. The discussion of General Guidelines and Principles for the Preservation of the Marine Environment at the Ottawa meeting will be based on a paper submitted by Canada last September. The meeting will also have before it a Draft Convention on Ocean Dumping submitted by the USA last

June. Since then various Governments have had time to study the USA draft and it will be discussed further at the current meeting. It is expected that other Governments will submit their own drafts at Ottawa.

The Working Group will also discuss elements of a Comprehensive Plan to Preserve the Oceans, including such components as priority research needs, the identification of critical pollutants, developing systems to monitor the oceans, the collection, retrieval and dissemination of information. Practical measures for control and abatement of pollution at the national, regional and global levels will also be examined.

The United Nations Conference for the Human Environment is the first of its kind in history. It will bring together senior level officials and their advisers representing 130 member Governments of the United Nations to decide actions which must be taken to deal with the grave environmental crisis facing mankind.

NOTE TO EDITORS:

The Second Meeting of the Intergovernmental Working Group on Marine Pollution will open at 10:30 a.m. Monday, November 8, at the Conference Centre. The meeting will be addressed by the Hon. Jack Davis, Minister of the Environment, and Maurice F. Strong, Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment.

Representatives of the press and electronic media are invited to attend the opening and closing sessions. For further information call 992 6507.