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LAW OF THE SEA

The Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Mitchell Sharp, made the following statement in the House of Commons today:

The House will recall that on April 5, 1969 the Minister of Fisheries announced the Government's intention to draw further straight baselines delimiting Canada's territorial sea and exclusive fishing zones along the east coast of Nova Scotia and the west coast of Vancouver Island and the Queen Charlotte Islands. I am pleased to announce that the Governor-in-Council has now issued a list of geographical coordinates of points from which these baselines are to be drawn.

This new series of coordinates will be effective upon their publication in the Canada Gazette on June 11, under the authority of the 1964 Territorial Sea and Fishing Zones Act. That legislation created, beyond Canada's previously existing three-mile territorial sea, a further nine-mile zone within which Canada has exclusive jurisdiction over fisheries. At the same time the 1964 legislation empowered the Government to establish along the coasts of Canada a system of straight baselines which, in the areas where they were established, would replace the sinuosities of the coast as the starting point for measuring the breadth of Canada's territorial sea and fishing zones. Such baselines may be drawn from headland to headland, from island to island and across the mouth of bays. Sea areas landward of the straight baselines have the status of internal waters of Canada.

A first series of baselines was established by the Government in November 1967 for the coast of Labrador and the southern and eastern coasts of Newfoundland.

Pending the conclusion of negotiations with certain European countries, the fishermen of these countries have been allowed to continue in Canada's outer nine-mile zone the fishing activities they had been carrying out in those areas where they had traditionally fished prior to the passage of the Territorial Sea and Fishing Zones Act and the establishment of baselines thereunder.

The countries involved in these negotiations were Great Britain, Norway, Denmark, France, Portugal, Spain and Italy. All of these have traditional fishing practices on Canada's east coast. It is now proposed to proceed further with the negotiations with the European countries concerned.

With respect to the United States, which has conducted traditional fishing activities off both Canada's east and west coasts, we intend to proceed with negotiations for the continuance of the present arrangement whereby Canadian and United States nationals are permitted to fish in the fishing zones of the other country on a reciprocal basis. Apart from traditional fishing practices, the United States and France also have certain treaty rights off Canada's east coast, and these rights will of course be respected.

A number of important gaps remain along Canada's east and west coasts after the establishment of the new series of baselines for Nova Scotia, Vancouver Island and the Queen Charlottes. As the Minister of Fisheries indicated in his announcement of April 5, the Government intends to deal with certain of these gaps, as appropriate, after securing an amendment to the Territorial Sea and Fishing Zones Act during the next session of the House. The desired amendment will provide greater flexibility for dealing with coastal areas and will permit the Governor-in-Council to draw "fisheries closing lines" enclosing certain areas as exclusive fishing zones without extending the limits of Canada's internal waters or territorial sea. At present, of course, Canada's fishing zones consist of a nine-mile belt contiguous to the territorial sea, and therefore cannot be extended without at the same time extending Canada's internal waters and territorial sea by means of straight baselines.

I would request the permission of the House to table the Order-in-Council establishing the new baselines for Nova Scotia, Vancouver Island and the Queen Charlotte Islands, as well as the Canadian Hydrographic Service Charts illustrating these baselines and the outer limits of Canada's territorial sea and fishing zones in the areas concerned.