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Background to the Dixon Entrance
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BACKGROUND

DOCUMENTATION

Dept. of External Affairs
Min. des Affaires extérieures

MAY 25 1992

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BACKGROUND TO THE DIXON ENTRANCE DECISION

- The long-standing Canadian position is that the waters of Dixon Entrance are internal waters of Canada and that the A-B Line (established by the Alaska Boundary Tribunal of 1903) is both the land and maritime boundary in Dixon Entrance. Canada's consent to the transits to and from Behm Canal is totally consistent with its legal position on this maritime boundary.
- Canada supports the objective of improving the effectiveness of the U.S. submarine-based nuclear deterrent, which contributes to the security of the North American continent. Submarines have a crucial deterrent role in the defence of North America because they have a high degree of survivability and enormous potential retaliatory capability. Because of this, acoustic testing facilities, such as SEAFAC are vital. Scheduled to open in November 1991, it is designed to measure the acoustic "signature" of U.S. submarines, thereby helping them remain undetected while on deployment.
- Under international law, Canada has the right to control the movement of foreign government-owned vessels in its internal waters. This control can be exercised through prior consent. It is the prerogative of the coastal state to determine whether this control will be exercised by consent in each and every case, or on a general basis. In the current case, transits to and from the Behm Canal facility will be submerged. The USA will, however, provide Canada with prior notification of the commencement and duration of each operation. Given this, and the fact that the activity is beneficial to Canada, the government is providing prior blanket consent to these transits. This has not affected our position on the status of the waters of Dixon Entrance in any way.
- The submarines will transit north of Learmonth Bank and travel approximately 50 nautical miles before crossing the A-B Line. The U.S. Navy has agreed to proceed with extreme caution in Dixon Entrance, and will minimize transits during peak fishing seasons. The submarines are equipped with sophisticated electronic equipment which is capable of detecting and avoiding fishing gear.

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● In the very unlikely event of an accident or damage to Canadians or their property, the U.S. government has provided written assurances to the Canadian government with respect to liability and compensation. The U.S. Navy has agreed to settle claims fairly and promptly.

● The Canadian Government has reviewed the environmental aspects of the transits and has concluded that the environmental consequences from consenting to the passage are not significant. In over 84 million miles and 3,700 reactor years of operation, American nuclear-powered vessels, including submarines, have had no reactor accidents or any radioactivity release which has had a significant or discernible effect on the quality of the environment.

● In order to protect the environment and assure the safety of Canadians, water samples are taken prior to, during and after each visit by nuclear-powered ships to Canadian ports. In addition, bottom samples are taken once every six months at locations where nuclear-powered ships berth, and from designated upstream and downstream locations. Analyzed water and bottom samples have consistently shown that no radioactive contamination that might have resulted from the presence of a nuclear-powered ship has ever been detected.

ASSESSMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS OF POLICY

- TRANSIT OF DIXON ENTRANCE BY U.S. SUBMARINES

POLICY

1. For the Governor-General in Council to provide Canadian consent for the transit of Canadian internal waters of Dixon Entrance by U.S. submarines to and from the new U.S. Navy Southeast Alaska Sound Measurement Facility (SEAFAC) at Behm Canal, Alaska.

BACKGROUND

2. The location of the U.S. facility, while established entirely on U.S. territory, requires that transits to it be made through Dixon Entrance. Canada's long-standing position is that the waters of Dixon Entrance are internal waters of Canada, an assertion disputed by the USA which claims part of Dixon Entrance as U.S. territorial waters. The establishment of the facility itself has passed the environmental impact process under both U.S. federal, as well as Alaska state law.

ASSESSMENT BASIS

3. This document is intended to be read in conjunction with the Environmental Assessment of Policy on visits to ports by nuclear powered vessels and vessels capable of carrying nuclear weapons, prepared primarily by the Department of National Defence, in consultation with other interested departments such as Environment Canada, Health and Welfare and Fisheries and Oceans (see Annex 1). For each section of that assessment that applies to elements in the Dixon Entrance transits case, a cross reference is provided, and additional comment is added where appropriate.

4. The subject reviewed here is the environmental effects of the policy measure proposed. It is not intended to assess other policy considerations involved in this decision, such as sovereignty or bilateral and alliance military relationships.

5. The approach used will involve:

- a. identifying the activities implicated by the policy;
- b. identifying the environmental effects and linkages;
- c. identifying the main issues of concern;
- d. describing the potential impacts;
- e. drawing assessment conclusions and recommendations.

POLICY OPTIONS

6. As the SEAFAC facility is entirely within U.S. territory, and as Canada supports the purpose of the facility, which will enhance the security of our two countries, the policy options revolved around the assurance that Canadian sovereignty, safety, and environmental considerations were met. Canadian and U.S. officials held lengthy discussions on these issues, with a view to facilitating operations at SEAFAC while taking into consideration Canada's concerns. Therefore, the direct environmental effects of the transits have been viewed in this context.

ACTIVITIES IMPLICATED BY THE POLICY

7. The question of transits through Dixon Entrance, while also involving U.S. NPVs, is, in some respects, different than the issue of port visits. Transits do not involve activities related to docking, armaments practice, or manoeuvring in shallow, narrow waterways, nor any activities close to the Canadian shoreline. Submerged transits would take place through approximately 50-60 nautical miles of Canadian internal waters, in deep, wide channels.

8. At the meeting of the Permanent Joint Board on Defence in August 1990, the U.S. side indicated that no more than fifteen submarines would traverse the Dixon Entrance annually, and would traverse it submerged. They would attempt to avoid transits during the peak runs of king and coho salmon (20 May to 10 June and 10-30 August). Advanced navigational gear would be used.

9. The types of submarines transiting could include both SSNs and SSBNs. Data on the operating safety of some models have entered the public domain as a result of court cases in the United States.

10. It should be noted that for security reasons the U.S. does not release certain confidential technical information about the design, manufacture and operation of their nuclear submarines. Their absence, however, does not make a review under the procedures laid out for the environmental assessment of policies and programmes impossible.

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

11. The area of the Dixon Entrance, at the northern end of the Queen Charlotte Islands, is rich in marine biota, and natural beauty. A commercial fishery for salmon, ground-fish, halibut, sable-fish, crabs and shellfish is important to the region. The waters are renowned as a resort for marine mammals: a number of

species of whales and sea lions feed there in large numbers, and are attracting a growing number of cruise boats and tours.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

12. The risks associated with the transit of SSN or SSBN submarines through Dixon Entrance are not identical to those that occur when the same vessels make port calls. The differences lie in risks attributable to marine surroundings, navigation hazards, and the propinquity of human settlements. In all these cases the risks associated with transits are even lower than they are for port visits. While the hazard of submarine entanglement with fishing gear can occur in either case, it relates more to safety than to the environment. Moreover, Canadian conventional submarines also create similar risks in Canadian waters on the East coast, which have been accepted.

13. The following summarizes how the conclusions of the Environmental Assessment of Port Visits by Nuclear Ships (Annex I) apply to concerns identified in respect of transits:

A Acute Safety Risk Associated with Potential Nuclear Accidents (page 5/14) - risks judged not significant

The risks are considered even less significant for Dixon Entrance (DE) than for Port Visits (PV), because the area affected is less heavily populated, and navigation is generally simpler. There is ample depth for navigating submerged throughout its length. The submarines will also be less vulnerable to unauthorized access.

B Effects on Marine Animals of Exposure to Low-Level Radiation (page 9/14) - risks not expected to have negative impact

Levels of radiation in the waters around nuclear-powered submarines have been measured by Canadian and allied scientists over several decades. The total amount of low-level radioactivity released into the environment is insignificant compared to naturally occurring background radiation. Therefore, this would not be expected to have significant impacts on marine mammals.

C Long Term Health Effects on Humans of Exposure to Low Level Radiation (page 10/14) - risks demonstrated to be negligible

Canadian human exposure to radiation in the Dixon Entrance as a result of normal submarine transits will be nil.

D Water Quality and Waste Disposal of Garbage (page 12/14) incremental impact not considered significant.

This assessment is equally true of U.S. submarine transits through the Dixon Entrance, where garbage and waste water discharges are highly unlikely given that they will be just

about to berth, or have just left, and it is normal practice to perform these operations either in port reception facilities, or inconspicuously far out at sea. Garbage and waste water from normal levels of shipping in the Entrance exceeds by many magnitudes anything that could be expected from the submarines.

E Safety of Submarine Transits Through Fishing Zones (page 12/14) - Overall, risk not considered significant.

While increased submarine presence in Dixon Entrance is a new element, the fact that the transits will be submerged reduces the risk of collision or entanglement with fishing vessels considerably. Furthermore, this is not a nuclear risk, nor is it entirely of foreign origin.

There are four types of Canadian commercial offshore fisheries operating in the Entrance. The halibut, ground-fish, and hook-and-line operations (95 - 135 vessels) sometimes use bottom-situated gear. The salmon, crab, and commercial shellfish operations are less at risk from deep transits, while salmon operators (300 - 500 vessels), fishing closer to the surface, have no risk of encountering submarines travelling at considerable depth.

The main responsibility for avoiding damaging encounters must lie with the submarine operators (since fishing boats are generally unaware of their presence). While incidents can occur, usually in shallow, narrow, heavily travelled waters, the U.S. Navy submarine service has a very creditable record in avoiding fishing nets and gear. U.S. submarines are also equipped with some of the best marine navigation equipment in the world. Avoiding incidents is a performance priority for skippers.

The U.S. intention to avoid running submarine tests during the salmon seasons is intended to ensure that incidents do not occur. The U.S. has also provided assurances on liability and compensation.

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

14. The U.S. Navy will be informing both the Department of National Defence through MARPAC in Esquimalt, and the Department

of Fisheries and Oceans Regional Office in Prince Rupert of the commencement and duration of submarine operations at the SEAFAC facility.

MITIGATION AND MONITORING

15. The possibilities for close monitoring of transits will be few, given that they will take place submerged. Reports of alleged damage from submarine-fishing boat encounters will need to be documented and provided to the U.S. Navy, which has undertaken to deal expeditiously and fairly with claims. U.S. assurances on liability and compensation are public, and can be obtained from the Department of External Affairs and International Trade.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

16. The considerations set forth in this assessment lead to the conclusion that the environmental consequences from consenting to the passage of submarines through Dixon Entrance are not considered significant. The possibility of submarine-fishing boat accidental encounters is the only area of potential increase in existing risk, albeit it is a small one. This is not an environmental concern but one of safety, that can be alleviated through practices and arrangements already in place.

Given the profusion of aquatic life in the Dixon Entrance, it is recommended that research on discharges and on related biological matters be continued.

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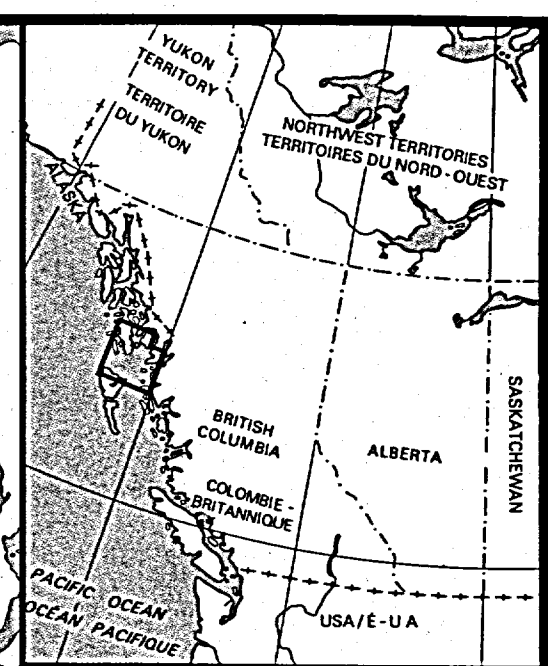
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CANADA

NPV/NCV BACKGROUND BRIEFING

Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen. You will have read the statement made by the Minister of National Defence and the Secretary of State for External Affairs in which they announced that the Government of Canada is:

- * - granting consent for British and American military nuclear powered vessels to pass through Canadian waters and visit designated Canadian ports.

- * - granting consent to British and American military vessels that are capable of carrying nuclear weapons to pass through Canadian waters and visit Canadian ports.

- * - granting consent for American nuclear powered submarines to pass submerged through Canadian waters in the Dixon Entrance on their way to a U.S. Navy acoustic testing facility in Alaska.

You will also have read the Department of National Defence Summary of findings of the environmental assessment of the policy concerning port visits by nuclear propelled vessels and vessels capable of carrying nuclear weapons, and the Department of External Affairs assessment of the environmental implications of the policy of permitting transits of Dixon Entrance by submerged submarines. I am here this morning to present you with a briefing which will expand on the facts surrounding visits to Canadian ports by Nuclear Powered Vessels and Vessels capable of carrying Nuclear Weapons, and the passage of submarines through the Dixon Entrance.

At present these port visits take place on a regular basis. Nuclear powered vessels visit only Halifax on the East Coast, Esquimalt, and Nanoose on the West Coast with approximately 6 to 8 visits to each port each year. Visits by vessels capable of carrying nuclear weapons are, at present much more frequent, as they include all visits by Ships of Destroyer size and up, with 37 visits to East Coast ports and 101 visits to West Coast ports so far this year. First, I would like to explain that permitting visits by these vessels is not in any way a change to existing

policy. Indeed, as an indispensable component of alliance cooperation, Canada has welcomed visits by allied nuclear powered warships, and allied warships which potentially carry nuclear weapons for more than two decades. What the Government has done today is to reaffirm the continuance of a long standing, safe and necessary policy.

The cornerstone of Canadian defence policy is to deter the use of force or coercion against Canada and Canadian interests, both at home and overseas. As Canada has a very large land mass with vast ocean approaches and only a relatively small population with limited resources for defence, this objective can only be met within the collective security framework provided by an alliance such as NATO, which relies on a mix of nuclear and conventional weapons to sustain its strategy of deterrence.

Notwithstanding the recent and most encouraging events which have taken place in the Soviet Union, including President Gorbachev's response to President Bush's initiative on tactical nuclear weapons, that country still has, and will continue to maintain, a

considerable nuclear arsenal. Moreover, even with the improved prospects for a lasting peace between East and West, there remains much instability in the post Cold War world and potential for both direct and indirect threats to our security. Thus, a NATO strategy of conventional and nuclear deterrence remains valid. Canada does not have nuclear weapons, but we support the maintenance of the nuclear forces of our allies which are necessary for stable and effective deterrence. Allowing visits to Canadian ports by warships which are nuclear powered or may carry nuclear weapons is an essential contribution to the maintenance of the naval component of the Alliance deterrent, and is a symbol of Alliance cooperation and solidarity.

While President Bush has indicated in his recent announcement that all tactical nuclear weapons will be withdrawn from US ships at sea, the policy of permitting these visits is still appropriate; firstly, because strategic weapons will continue to be deployed in certain classes of nuclear submarine. Secondly, tactical nuclear weapons will be at sea for some time to come as the new policy cannot be implemented overnight; and finally the President has stated that the fleet may be

rearmed with these weapons in the event of a crisis. However, you will wish to note that once all these weapons have been withdrawn, the United States may modify the "neither confirm nor deny" policy. Therefore, in the not very distant future, barring some serious crisis, most warships visiting Canadian ports will not normally be carrying nuclear weapons.

Before I go any further on the subject of visits I would like to say a few words about transits of Dixon Entrance by US submarines. As you know, the United States will soon open an underwater acoustic testing facility in Alaskan waters at the southern end of the Alaskan panhandle. The purpose of this facility is to enhance the silence, and therefore the survivability of the submarine based deterrence force. The natural approach to this facility is through the Dixon Entrance, and the US Navy is proposing to transit these waters submerged. Canada's long standing position is that the waters of the Dixon Entrance are internal waters of Canada. The US disputes this, claiming the northern portion as US territorial waters. Under international law, submarines of one state wishing to transit the internal waters of another state must receive "prior consent". The Order-in-Council announced by the Secretary of State for

External Affairs provides that "prior consent". This action was taken for two very good reasons. First, it protects our sovereignty in international law over these waters; and second, it is an expression of our support for this important project which maintains and enhances the credibility of the deterrent which is essential to the security of Canada and North America.

As I said before, permitting visits by these vessels is not a new policy and it was, in fact, in 1967 that the Government agreed to the visits of nuclear powered vessels provided that arrangements be established for liability in the event of an accident, and that all such visits be cleared through an ad hoc interdepartmental committee. In that same year the Government approved a policy permitting allied warships to visit without declaring the nature of embarked weapons. This was conditional on provision of certain blanket assurances regarding security and stowage of weapons, and liability in the case of an accident. This approval was in consonance with the policy adopted by our allies for strategic reasons that they would neither confirm nor deny the presence of nuclear weapons aboard their ships.

I have told you what the policy is and I have explained the policy, now I would like to outline the safety and environmental factors which were considered in establishing and continuing this policy.

I can assure you that visits by nuclear powered warships and ships capable of carrying nuclear weapons, were approved **only** after assurances regarding safety, liability and compensation had been received, and the Government was convinced that these were safe and environmentally non-threatening activities. Since the first visit of a nuclear powered warship to Canada, radiation monitoring has been carried out. It is noteworthy that **NO** increase in radioactivity has ever been associated with these visits. In addition the safety record of our allies in the operation of these vessels over the entire history of their programs has been excellent. Even though there have been accidents involving nuclear powered warships, **NONE** has been caused by a nuclear propulsion system failure and none has resulted in the release of significant quantities of radioactive materials. This, combined with the Department of National Defence's knowledge of these systems, and the

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numerous safety features they incorporate, satisfies us that these visits pose a negligible risk to public safety and the environment.

The technical details related to nuclear weapons differ significantly from those for nuclear propulsion. Our allies have affirmed the very elaborate precautions in place to prevent any accidental or unauthorized detonation of these devices. These precautions include defusing these weapons and taking the same precautions that they do in their own home ports. Nuclear weapons are afforded very thorough physical security not only to protect against unauthorized tampering, but also to prevent any damage to the warhead which could release radioactive material into the environment. These assurances and the impressive allied record in the safe custody of nuclear weapons, provide convincing evidence that their presence is environmentally non-threatening.

Despite our confidence in the safety of visits by Nuclear Propelled Vessels and vessels capable of carrying nuclear weapons, before this policy was reaffirmed, the Department of National Defence

conducted an environmental assessment of these policies which concluded that the risk of adverse environmental impact was insignificant and that the visits could continue.

This assessment covered 9 issues which were considered to be of interest, and over the next few minutes I will describe each of these issues and discuss the findings. These findings are summarized in the document you were handed as you came in here today.

We reviewed the safety risk associated with potential nuclear accidents for both vessels capable of carrying nuclear weapons and nuclear propelled vessels.

First I will deal with vessels capable of carrying nuclear weapons. The risks associated with nuclear weapons are very slight indeed. Technical details of the design and construction of nuclear weapons, much of which is available in open literature, indicates that the risk of unauthorized or accidental detonation of a ship-borne weapon is negligible. A very remote risk exists that a fire or an explosion of all or

part of the conventional explosive trigger might result in the dispersion of some hazardous radioactive material. However, on board fixed fire fighting systems, multiple containment barriers, and highly trained fire fighting and damage control crews are additional safeguards over and above the designed safety features, which further reduce any risk. You may be interested to know that an Australian Senate enquiry considered this risk to be so unlikely that no contingency planning was necessary. It is based on these facts and the assurances provided by the US and U.K. governments that we determined that the risks associated with visits by vessels capable of carrying nuclear weapons are insignificant.

Now a few words on nuclear propelled vessels. There is a significant amount of information on naval nuclear reactors in open literature. There are a wide variety of risks associated with nuclear power plants that range from relatively high probability - low consequence events such as the release of low level radioactive liquid wastes, to low probability - high consequence events such as a core meltdown with subsequent release of radioactive material to the

environment. Because of the extensive safety precautions taken in the design, construction and operation of naval nuclear power plants, the probability that high consequence events will occur is extremely low. These precautions include both inherent and engineered safety features such as a multi-barrier approach to ensure containment of the radioactive material. The record of both the US and the U.K. in the operation of these systems shows that there has never been an accident resulting in a release of radioactivity which has had a discernable effect on the environment. A record, which in the case of the United States covers some 35 years and 3700 reactor-years. Indeed, the chances of someone being killed by radiation released as a result of an allied naval reactor accident is about the same as being struck by a meteor. Moreover, Canadian monitoring of air, water, and sediments around berthed nuclear propelled vessels, undertaken over the past 20 years, has not detected any increase in radioactivity. Monitoring results are available from the Department of Health and Welfare and provincial health authorities in both British Columbia and Nova Scotia. All this combined with the assurances of our two closest allies, provides us with a very high degree of confidence that the risks are not significant.

Additionally , a number of other factors were looked at:

- * We investigated the potential effect on marine animals of exposure to low-level radiation. We concluded, on the basis of the fact that no releases of radioactive material of any type are authorized in Canadian waters, that the only risk of exposure is from accidental minor releases. As no such minor releases have ever been detected in Canada, we determined that their frequency, if indeed they ever occur, is probably very low and that their impact would be insignificant on marine animals.

- * We also explored the long term health effects on humans of direct and indirect exposure to low-level radiation. Once again, as no releases of radioactive material are authorized and none has ever been detected, we concluded that the probability of minor releases is very low. Even numerous

routine releases, if they were permitted in Canadian waters (which they are not) would result in negligible effects.

Therefore, we believe the impact on human health to be **insignificant**.

- * The economic impact of local procurement of goods and services plus the tourism/recreation activities enjoyed by crews of visiting nuclear propelled vessels and/or vessels capable of carrying nuclear weapons was considered. We determined that this impact is probably **significant and positive**, as many of these ships spend considerable amounts of money during their visits.

- * We considered the social impact of the presence in the community of potentially large numbers of allied military personnel. Because the port communities visited by nuclear propelled vessels and vessels capable of carrying nuclear weapons have a long history of such visits, and social and recreational facilities to accommodate them are well

established, we estimated that there will be **no significant adverse impacts.**

- * **As the non-nuclear waste disposal requirements such as sewage, grey water, and garbage are no different for these ships than for any other visiting warship we considered the incremental impacts to be insignificant.**

- * **The effects of the presence of these vessels on harbour traffic and the provision of berthing services were also considered. However, harbour facilities have evolved to provide sufficient capacity to ensure no significant adverse impacts.**

- * **Finally, The Department of External Affairs with the cooperation and assistance of the Departments of the Environment, National Defence, Health and Welfare, and Fisheries and Oceans has completed an assessment of the policy of permitting the transit of submerged US submarines through the Dixon Entrance. This assessment concludes that**

the environmental consequences of consenting to these passages are **not significant**. This environmental assessment will be made available to the public.

Though we assessed 8 of 9 potential impacts as being **not significant**, and the other one as potentially **significant** and **positive**, much of the data provided to support these conclusions comes from our allies and the historical record. Therefore, in late 1990 we decided to update the harbour assessments for nuclear propelled warship visits. Additionally, in compliance with the Government's Green Plan, an environmental review of the current visits program is being carried out in concert with the harbour assessments. So you can see that all the potential impacts I have discussed here today will be the subject of further in-depth study to refine the analysis and, if necessary, to develop better plans and procedures to ensure that the safest conditions always prevail.

On the basis of this assessment, we concluded that the confidence we had in the safety and environmentally non-threatening nature of visits by nuclear propelled vessels and vessels capable of carrying nuclear weapons was well placed, and the Government could permit the continuation of these visits while we carry out the follow on studies. This same conclusion has been reached regarding the transit of submarines through the Dixon Entrance.

Now, I would like to introduce you to the panel and after that we would be happy to respond to your questions.



news release communiqué

Date

Date

For release

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AFN: 44/91

October 30, 1991

MINISTERS ANNOUNCE MEASURES REGARDING ALLIED NUCLEAR VESSELS IN CANADIAN WATERS

OTTAWA -- The Minister of National Defence, the Honourable Marcel Masse, and the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Barbara McDougall, announced today a series of measures that have been taken in the context of our commitments to our NATO allies regarding the passage through Canadian waters of nuclear propelled and nuclear weapons-capable allied vessels.

The measures were covered in three Orders-in-Council which provide for the following:

- Consent for U.S. and British nuclear propelled vessels to pass through Canadian waters and visit designated Canadian ports.
- Consent for U.S. and British vessels that are capable of carrying nuclear weapons to pass through Canadian waters and visit Canadian ports.
- Consent for U.S. nuclear propelled submarines to pass submerged through Canadian waters in the Dixon Entrance on their way to a U.S. Navy acoustic testing facility in Alaska.

"These measures represent a reaffirmation of our alliance commitments and our determination to contribute to the maintenance of a reliable deterrence capability in NATO," said Mr. Masse. "While there have been many remarkable changes that promise a reduced military threat in the future, we must be prudent in ensuring Canada's security. These port visits have been a part of Canadian defence policy for more than two decades and this announcement reassures our allies that Canada will maintain its commitment."

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Mrs. McDougall added: "It is an undeniable fact of history and international law that the waters of Dixon Entrance are internal waters of Canada. As far as Canada is concerned, the boundary was settled by the 1903 Alaska Boundary Award which established the A-B Line as both the land and maritime boundary. Therefore, Canadian consent to these transits is essential and reflects our support for a project aimed at the maintenance of credible security for North America."

The environmental aspects of these decisions have been reviewed pursuant to the 1990 Cabinet decision to assess the environmental implications of its policy and program proposals. A summary of the Environmental Assessment of Policy regarding port visits and the Assessment of the Environmental Implications of Policy regarding the transit of Dixon Entrance are available.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: A background briefing will be held at 11 a.m. today in Conference Room D at National Defence Headquarters. Escort officers will meet accredited media representatives at the McKenzie King Entrance to NDHQ at 10:45 a.m.

For more information, media representatives may contact:

Media Relations Office
External Affairs and International Trade Canada (613) 995-1874

Defence Media Liaison
Department of National Defence (613) 996-2353



news release communiqué

Date

Date

For release

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AFN: 44/91

Le 30 octobre 1991

DEUX MINISTRES ANNONCENT DES MESURES RELATIVES AUX NAVIRES NUCLÉAIRES QUI CIRCULENT DANS LES EAUX CANADIENNES

OTTAWA — Le ministre de la Défense nationale, l'honorable Marcel Masse, et la Secrétaire d'État aux Affaires extérieures, l'honorable Barbara McDougall, ont annoncé aujourd'hui une série de mesures prises dans le contexte de nos engagements envers nos alliés au sein de l'OTAN en ce qui a trait au passage, dans les eaux canadiennes, des navires à propulsion nucléaire et des navires à capacité nucléaire.

Ces mesures ont été énoncées dans trois décrets, qui prévoyaient de permettre :

- aux navires à propulsion nucléaire des États-Unis et de la Grande-Bretagne de circuler dans les eaux canadiennes et de visiter des ports désignés au Canada;
- aux navires à capacité nucléaire des États-Unis et de la Grande-Bretagne de circuler dans les eaux canadiennes et de visiter des ports du Canada;
- aux sous-marins à propulsion nucléaire des États-Unis de circuler en immersion dans les eaux canadiennes et de passer par l'entrée Dixon pour se rendre aux installations d'essai acoustique de la marine américaine qui sont établies en Alaska.

“Ces mesures confirment nos engagements envers nos alliés et notre détermination à contribuer au maintien d'une capacité de dissuasion fiable au sein de l'OTAN”, a indiqué M. Masse. “Bien qu'il se soit produit de nombreux changements remarquables qui permettent d'espérer une réduction de la menace militaire dans l'avenir, nous devons

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nous montrer prudents lorsqu'il s'agit d'assurer la sécurité du Canada. Les visites dans les ports font partie intégrante de la politique de défense du Canada depuis plus de vingt ans et, par cette annonce, le Canada confirme à ses alliés qu'il continuera à respecter ses engagements envers eux."

Pour sa part, Mme McDougall a ajouté: "Il est indéniable, tant sur le plan historique que sur celui du droit international, que les eaux de l'entrée Dixon font partie des eaux territoriales canadiennes. C'est la ligne frontière de l'Alaska qui constitue la limite à la fois terrestre et maritime du Canada depuis l'entrée en vigueur de l'*Alaska Boundary Award*, en 1903. Par conséquent, il est essentiel que le Canada consente au passage des navires alliés dans ces eaux. Cet accord reflète notre appui à l'égard d'un projet visant le maintien d'un système de sécurité crédible en Amérique du Nord."

Les aspects environnementaux de ces mesures ont été examinés par suite de la décision du Cabinet, en 1990, d'évaluer les incidences environnementales des propositions touchant la politique et le programme. Il est maintenant possible de se procurer un résumé de l'Évaluation environnementale de la politique en ce qui a trait aux visites dans les ports ainsi que des incidences environnementales de la politique liées au passage dans l'entrée Dixon.

NOTE AUX RÉDACTEURS: Une séance d'information aura lieu aujourd'hui à 11 h, dans la salle de conférence D du Quartier général de la Défense nationale. Des officiers d'escorte attendront les représentants des médias accrédités à l'entrée McKenzie King du QGDN à 10 h 45.

Pour obtenir de plus amples renseignements, les représentants des médias peuvent s'adresser au :

Bureau des relations avec les médias
Affaires extérieures et commerce extérieur Canada
(613) 995-1874

Bureau de liaison avec les médias (MDN)
Ministère de la Défense nationale
(613) 996-2353

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT OF POLICY

POLICY

1. To approve the continuation of visits to Canadian ports by U.S. and U.K. nuclear powered vessels (NPVs) and vessels capable of carrying nuclear weapons (NCVs).

BACKGROUND

2. The Government of Canada first approved the policy of allowing visits to Canadian ports by U.S. and U.K. naval NPVs and NCVs in 1967. The approval was granted, contingent upon the assurances of safety, liability and compensation given by the U.S. and U.K. and after careful consideration of the technology and the U.K. assessment of the proposed berths for nuclear submarines. The authority to approve visits by U.S. and U.K. naval NPVs and NCVs was delegated to the Department of National Defence in 1972.

3. Since then, U.S. Navy (USN) and Royal Navy (RN) NPVs and NCVs have visited Canadian ports on a regular basis. In addition, there has been one visit to Halifax by the French SSN Saphir. Recently, several west coast municipalities and interest groups have requested an environmental assessment of these visits.

4. The Department of National Defence has completed an examination of the environmental implications of these visits.

SUMMARY OF IMPACTS

5. The safety risk associated with potential nuclear accidents was reviewed with respect to both NCVs and NPVs.

- a. with respect to NCVs, it was determined, on the basis of the Department's knowledge of the design of nuclear weapons, the excellent safety record, and the assurances of Canada's allies, that there is a very high degree of confidence that the risks are not significant; and
- b. with respect to NPVs, it was determined, on the basis of Canada's knowledge of the design of marine nuclear reactors, the safety record (including Canadian monitoring), and the assurances of Canada's allies, that there is a

very high degree of confidence that the risks are not significant.

6. The potential effect on marine animals of exposure to low-level radiation was investigated. It was concluded, on the basis of the fact that no releases are authorized in Canadian waters, that the only risk of exposure is from accidental minor releases. It was also determined, on the basis that no such minor releases have ever been detected in Canada, that their frequency, if above zero, is probably very low and that their impact would be insignificant on marine animals.

7. The long term health effects on humans of direct and indirect exposure to low-level radiation was investigated. It was concluded, on the basis of the fact that it is Canadian policy that there shall be no releases of radioactive material in Canadian waters and that none has ever been detected, that the probability of minor releases is very low (accidental or otherwise). It was also determined that even exaggerated levels of routine releases, if they were permitted (which they are not) would result in negligible effects. From this information, it was concluded that the impact on human health is likely to be insignificant.

8. The economic impact of the local procurement and tourism/recreation activities enjoyed by crews of visiting NPVs/NCVs was considered. It was determined that this impact is probably significant and positive.

9. The social impact of the presence in the community of potentially large numbers of allied military personnel was considered. It was determined, on the basis of the fact that the port communities visited by NPVs and NCVs have a long history of such visits, and social and recreational facilities to accommodate them are well established, that the impacts are likely to be insignificant.

10. Water quality and waste disposal issues associated with the routine disposal of ship sewage, grey water, and garbage were considered. It was determined, on the basis of the similarity between the activities undertaken by NPVs/NCVs and other visiting ships, that the incremental impacts are not significant.

11. The effects of the presence of these vessels on harbour traffic and the provision of berthing services were considered. It was determined that harbour facilities have evolved to provide sufficient capacity to ensure no significant adverse impacts.

12. The safety of submerged submarine transits through fishing zones was considered, though not directly related to port visits. It was concluded, on the basis of the historical record, the fact that transits in Canadian territorial waters are generally on the surface, and the low fishing density, that the risk is **not significant**.

13. Though all potential impacts were judged **not significant**, much of the data provided to support these conclusions comes from our allies and the historical record. It was decided in 1990 to update the assessments for NPV/NCV visits. Further, in compliance with the Green Plan, an environmental review of the current policy of permitting these visits is being carried out in concert with the harbour assessments. Therefore, all the potential impacts discussed herein will be subject to further in-depth study to confirm the analysis and, if necessary, to develop better plans and procedures to ensure that the safest conditions always prevail.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

14. On the basis of this assessment, it was concluded that there is enough confidence in the safety and high potential for insignificant adverse environmental impact associated with visits of NCVs and NPVs to permit the visits to continue. This conclusion assumed that the importance of the visits to Canadian defence and foreign policy is such that the remaining uncertainties need not be investigated as a precondition to continuing the visits.

15. The Department proposes that the Government grant approval for the continuation of NPV and NCV visits, and that the following measures be implemented:

- a. specific environmental and harbour assessments be continued to ensure all possible safety and mitigation measures are identified;
- b. Canadian Forces nuclear emergency response plans be reviewed and improved in accordance with the recommendations resulting from the specific environmental and harbour assessments and integrated with those of civilian authorities.

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