

News Release

March 18, 1995

No. 57

CONSERVATION AND ENFORCEMENT PRIMARY CONCERNS IN FISH DISPUTE

Foreign Affairs Minister André Ouellet said today that resolution of the Canada-European Union (EU) fisheries issue depends on agreement on the central issues of fish-stock conservation and enforcement of measures designed to protect the fragile fisheries of the Northwest Atlantic.

"We note the progress made to date in negotiations between Canada and the EU," said Mr. Ouellet. "But there is still a long way to go."

The Minister warned that speculation on fishing quotas and other aspects of an eventual agreement is premature until Canada's key concerns with respect to conservation and enforcement have been dealt with.

Mr. Ouellet dismissed as false reports that suggested specific quota allocations are already being considered by the Canadian government.

"We are on record as saying we are prepared to discuss transitional arrangements on quotas," the Minister said. "At the same time, the sharing of the resource cannot be settled until Canada is satisfied that adequate environmental and enforcement measures are to be put into place."

"As for consideration of quotas, we are not there yet," said Mr. Ouellet. "The primary issue between the EU and Canada is conservation and enforcement, not quotas."

"The immediate objective is to reach an agreement without delay in order that the problem of overfishing for Greenland halibut can be resolved now while there is still the opportunity to preserve the stocks for future generations."

The Minister noted that both Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO) scientific studies and the evidence discovered with respect to the Spanish vessel Estai - including

undersized fish and illegal nets - emphasize the urgency of the situation.

Mr. Ouellet said that the negotiating team of senior Canadian officials which has now returned to Ottawa will be consulting with the Government on the state of ongoing negotiations.

"Canada looks forward to the continuation of negotiations. It is crucial that we succeed on the central issues of conservation and enforcement, as well as quotas, if we are to preserve not only the species but also the welfare of fishing communities for future generations."

- 30 -

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