

2 May, 2005

For Immediate Release

A call for action at the high seas governance conference

Canadian conservation groups, fishermen, community members & international organisations call for Canada to lead actions to conserve our oceans

Fishermen, conservation groups, scientists and community economic development representatives attended a two day international conference, held April 29th and 30th in St. John's, Newfoundland. Participants concluded there are clear negative impacts of bottom trawl fishing gear on the sea floor¹.

“I was very encouraged by what I heard the scientists and others saying at this conference. Local fishermen have been describing for years the effect of dragging on our fisheries and how we have suffered because of it. Until now our concerns have been totally ignored,” said Captain Wilfred Bartlett, retired Newfoundland fisherman.

Gearshift participants traveled to the small fishing village of Petty Harbour, and learned first hand about the effects of poor fisheries management on coastal communities.

“We heard from Newfoundlanders of the profound suffering of local communities because the Canadian government didn't regulate this technology. We cannot let this happen on a global scale,” says Fred Winsor of the Fisheries Recovery Action Committee and Newfoundland historian.

Conference participants from across Newfoundland and around the world unanimously agreed there is a real urgency and need to protect bottom habitat on the high seas NOW. In particular, Canadian participants called upon their government to take a leadership role, and join other nations and the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition² in supporting a United Nations General Assembly resolution, calling for an interim prohibition on high seas bottom-trawling.

...2

-2-

¹ The results of the conference are consistent with a recent poll conducted by the Ecology Action Centre of Halifax, N.S available at <http://www.ecologyaction.ca/marine>

² The Deep Sea Conservation Coalition is an alliance of more than 40 international organisations, representing millions of people in countries around the world.

“Canada should see the call for a moratorium, not as a threat, but an opportunity. An interim prohibition on dragging on the whole of the high seas, would allow time for the international community to put in place, real conservation measures which would benefit Canada and the rest of the world,” says Mark Butler of Nova Scotia’s Ecology Action Centre.

Along with issuing strong warnings on the effects of bottom-trawling on marine ecosystems, speakers also presented examples from various national jurisdictions where scientists, fishermen and conservationists working together have implemented solutions.

According to Dave Allison, Campaign Director for Washington, D.C. based Oceana, “The time for explaining the problems facing our oceans is over. Today we heard real solutions to the crises facing our marine environment and coastal communities. The broad support for designation of mobile bottom trawl fishing areas was particularly encouraging.”

As the government conference, Moving from Words to Action begins, Gearshift Conference participants will be watching to see if their governments will act to protect the sea floor.

-30-

For more information, please contact
Julie Huntington or Jeff Ardron at 709-690-0401
Mark Butler or Fred Winsor at 709-682-4309
Wilfred Bartlett at 709-673-7218.