

NAFO finally has teeth to do what it's supposed to do

I made it clear before last week's annual meeting that Canada would not wait another year for NAFO to institute meaningful reforms. We worked hard to get what we wanted, and I'm proud to say that our hard work paid off.

Now, captains caught misreporting their catch will have their vessels yanked back to port immediately for inspection. This hits vessel owners right in their pocketbooks, because boats only make money if they're fishing. They have to pay for fuel to get in and out of port for inspections, and for crew members that aren't bringing in any fish.

Since 1993, there've been 67 cases of misreporting. This has contributed to the depletion of fish stocks in this area. With an estimated cost of \$15,000 per day to steam into port, a vessel recalled across the Atlantic could cost up to \$240,000. Having to come to port for a full inspection is a significant penalty.

All NAFO members will now be obligated to deal with any of their vessels caught breaking the rules. NAFO has agreed to the kinds of punishments that members must impose on these violators. Captains and vessel owners can be fined, have their gear and catch seized, or get their licences or quotas suspended.

As far as NAFO quotas go, they will now actually mean something. If a member objects to the way NAFO has allocated their catch quota, they'll have to prove their grievance to an independent panel. So unless they have a real reason for objecting, they'll have to abide by the quota or take their case to a UN Law of the Sea tribunal.

Now I realize there will always be critics who are never satisfied with NAFO, and that's fine. But the truth is: NAFO members agreed to major, concrete changes. Now it's time to hold the feet of those who cheat to the fire. That's exactly what I plan on doing.

Thanks to the new NAFO convention, there can now be legal action taken against NAFO flag states that do not deal with captains and vessel owners who break international law.

For as long as I've been talking about the need to stop foreign overfishing, I have always said that that we need to put in place a management regime outside the 200-mile limit similar to what we have inside the 200-mile limit. There have always been two options to deal with the problem. Canada could either work with other member countries in NAFO to police the vessels fishing out there, or we could try to do it ourselves.

The best way, of course, is to protect fish stocks with the co-operation of other countries. But as I've also said, for NAFO to work properly, it needed teeth. For too long, captains repeatedly caught breaking the rules have been allowed to keep fishing with no more than a slap on the wrist. And countries that didn't like a quota assigned to them could simply say "no thanks" and fish whatever they wanted.

No more.

Canada's new government is getting things done for families and taxpayers, and that includes standing up for Canada's coastal communities on the international stage.

The bottom line is that these changes move past vague, empty promises that didn't help us one bit, and actually set out a system that will hurt those who break the law. If they do not prove successful, we will be prepared to take action by ourselves.

These are the types of real results Canadians expect of their new government, and which we will continue to deliver.