

Etchegary condemns comments by Loyola Hearn on N&L fishery

Written by Administrator
Monday, 03 May 2010 08:27

Mr. Gus Etchegary, Chairman of the Fisheries Community Alliance in N&L, and a longtime advocate on fisheries issues, has condemned in a hard-hitting letter to N&L media (see below) recent statements by former federal fisheries minister Loyola Hearn.

Dear Editor:

Re: Loyola's Rant

If the speech by former DFO Minister Loyola Hearn was reported accurately in last Friday's St. John's Telegram it surely represents the epitome of misinformation that has continuously spewed from DFO Ministers and their senior bureaucrats in recent years. It was another vain attempt to bury the Federal fisheries mismanagement record since 1970 and particularly since the moratorium was declared in 1992.

How Hearn could muster the unmitigated gall to utter statements that all is well in the Newfoundland and Labrador fisheries, that DFO has everything under control and all we need to do is close a few fish plants and "consolidate" is surely one for the books. It is clear that whatever little knowledge he had of the N&L fisheries before and during his unfortunate term of office as Minister has completely evaporated. We all realize Mr. Hearn is comfortably enjoying his retirement with the support of two pensions provided by the taxpayer but surely he must be conscious enough to know some of the "facts of life" regarding the state of the federally mismanaged fisheries of 2010 of which the fishermen of our province are keenly aware on a 24 hour basis. Wake up, Mr. Hearn, to the fact that we have lost 15 percent of our population to the mainland and twenty five thousand jobs in fish processing and in the goods and service sector of the industry. On top of that, the future survival of rural N&L is in jeopardy because of federal fisheries mismanagement by you, your predecessors and now your successor.

Eighteen years have passed since John Crosbie declared a fishery moratorium against _Canadian_ participation in our groundfisheries while foreign fishermen from 20 NAFO nations have continued to fish the same resource with impunity. In case Mr. Hearn is blinded by the usual DFO lack of transparency he should know (a) there is no meaningful sign of recovery of the groundfish species that migrate outside 200 miles and that foreign vessels continue to fish the various species of fish diminished through direct fishing or through increased bycatch levels

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which NAFO have been able to implement without any objection from Canada. (b) That the scientific capability of DFO in the N&L Region has been deteriorating since the moratorium as a result of reduced numbers of fully qualified scientists because DFO are not replacing retiring scientists nor those others who are qualified and are moving to jobs elsewhere or to universities, _and_ due to the fact that (c) the Coast Guard that has the responsibility to provide reliable Research vessels to carry out the all-important research surveys and stock assessments, are incapable of fulfilling that mandate because the three vessels originally assigned to that task are far beyond their useful life and are frequently in port due to mechanical breakdowns or are being towed to port. Additionally, there is every evidence now that recent Federal budget cuts will exacerbate the situation. In recent days one of the remaining three vessels, the “Wilfred Templeman” which had two million dollars spent in refurbishing the vessel, has been stripped of all scientific capability and has been moved to a dock in St. John’s in a cold-layup mode and in what appears to be permanent tied-up status.

The continuing lack of transparency concerning foreign overfishing is frustrating. The Freedom of Information legislation is nothing but a shield behind which DFO hides when presented with questions requesting the number of infractions committed by NAFO nations or the punitive measures supposedly taken by offending countries. The stock answer from officials in DFO is “ the release of such information could be injurious to Canadian international negotiations”.

Other than former DFO Minister Hearn and his senior bureaucrats no one really knew what transpired at the NAFO Annual meeting in Spain when NAFO succeeded in quelling discussions on implementing Custodial Management to which the PM Harper and Hearn had committed in pre-election promises. Instead of NAFO considering Canadian Custodial Management the Russians, Spanish and other EU members “seized the pen” and introduced their own amendments to the NAFO agreement which will eventually permit NAFO nations to regain some measure of control of our fisheries inside two hundred miles. Those amendments became so controversial that four former bureaucrats with lengthy international negotiating experience were alarmed by its implications and they succeeded in persuading both the House of Commons and Senate Fisheries Committees to interview numerous expert witnesses and as a result both the House and Senate Committees rejected the amendments and recommended a debate and vote on the issue in Canada’s Parliament. Following that debate the elected Members of the House of Commons from Victoria, BC to St. John’s, N&L voted 147 to 142 to reject the controversial proposed amendments to the NAFO Convention.

As unbelievable as it may sound, the day after Parliament voted to reject the controversial amendments the present DFO Minister, Gail Shea

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of PEI advised NAFO that Canada was ratifying the same amendments. So much for democracy, the protection of Canada's fisheries and any hope of restoration of one the world's great sources of protein that has been practically destroyed by the same NAFO nations that authored the rejected amendments.

Former DFO Minister Hearn has the audacity to refer three times in his speech to the need for leadership in our fisheries. He says "there must be a plan, there has to be some leadership shown here. That would certainly help". Having made those pre-election commitments dealing with (1) foreign overfishing, (2) the deterioration on all fronts of DFO presence in N&L, especially in the field of science capability, (3) complete lack of transparency in DFO, (4) the continuing failure of NAFO to manage stocks migrating outside two hundred miles and (5) recognition of the obvious fact that N&L is the only fishing province impacted by foreign overfishing, having made those commitments and persuading the electorate to put him in the House of Commons and having failed the people of this province to the extent that its economic future is in jeopardy, Mr. Hearn should refrain from giving advice to the people now saddled with the job of rebuilding our fisheries.

Gus Etchegary
Chairman
Fisheries Community Alliance.

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