

for Saturday, August 30, 1997

Mifflin ignored turbot advice 8/29/97 (By STEPHEN THORNE, The Canadian Press)

HALIFAX Canada reversed a pre-election decision by former fisheries minister Fred Mifflin to increase its share of the turbot catch after a court struck down his 1997 management plan.

Fisheries Minister David Anderson quietly returned harvesting to traditional levels last week after Mifflin ignored his senior adviser, who warned claiming more turbot amounted to overfishing and could tarnish Canada's reputation.

The Canadian government could be seen as hypocritical by the international community that the Canadian government exhorts others to . . . share the burden of conservation but is unwilling to do likewise, Patrick Chamut, assistant deputy minister of fisheries management, cautioned Mifflin in a memo obtained by The Canadian Press.

The Federal Court of Canada ordered a reassessment of quotas last month primarily because the department didn't adequately consult with native people who launched the action.

Justice Douglas Campbell said Mifflin ignored the advice of his own assistant deputy minister in raising Canada's share of the allowable catch.

Mifflin did not return calls from The Evening Telegram or Canadian Press on Thursday.

It was conservation of turbot off the Grand Banks that Mifflin's predecessor, now Premier Brian Tobin, championed in a 1995 dispute with Spain.

Late last year, Chamut warned Mifflin he could be treading on thin ice if Canada grabbed more of the flatfish, also called Greenland halibut, in the cold waters of the Davis Strait between Baffin Island and Greenland.

Canada and the Danish province have traditionally shared the resource 50-50 5,500 tonnes of fish apiece in 1996. Most of Canada's share is exported.

Mifflin announced Canada was upping its claim to 60 per cent about 6,600 tonnes just before the federal election campaign in April, referring to bilateral discussions with Greenland.

While Greenland agreed to maintain the total allowable catch at 11,000 tonnes, it did not agree to give up any of its share of fish, warned Chamut.

In the recent discussions, Greenland did not agree to any change in this sharing for 1997, Chamut said in a lengthy memo issued Dec. 31.

The official said acting unilaterally could be perceived as contrary to the United Nations Fish Agreement and to Canada's proposed new fisheries act.

It could also alienate Denmark and other members of the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization, he warned.

Chamut noted many industry representatives from Mifflin's home province of Newfoundland were advocating Canada's unilaterally claim 70 per cent of the quota.

Such a move would lead to overfishing and would not be seen as conservation-minded, wrote Chamut. For Canada



FRED MIFFLIN

set its share above 5,500 tonnes would . . . be contrary to the scientific advice.

He noted more and more fishermen wanted access to turbot, presumably because moratoriums on depleted cod stocks had robbed them of their livelihoods.

A decision to increase above 50 per cent could be interpreted as the government stretching the quota to the aspirations of fishermen for socio-economic reasons, said Chamut.

And he suggested the fact Greenland has never actually taken all of its quota is irrelevant.

Mifflin declared Canada's claim April 7.

I am pleased to announce that more turbot will be available to Canadian fishermen this year, he said.

The election was called April 27. Mifflin, whose campaign staff solicited industry donations across the country, won a close battle in his riding of Bonavista-Trinity-Conception on June 2 and is now Veterans Affairs minister.

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