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BACKGROUND ON THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT TO ALLOCATING THE FIRST 115,000 TONNES OF NORTHERN COD TO THE INSHORE FLEET

The commitment to a 115,000-tonne allowance allocated to inshore harvesters in NAFO divisions 2J3KL is clear and consistent throughout groundfish management plans of the 1980s, before the stock entered moratorium. Securing this commitment was a shared effort between the provincial government of Newfoundland and Labrador and the federal department of Fisheries and Oceans.

The commitment to ensuring the inshore allowance of 115,000 tonnes was maintained was first made by the Peckford government. The announcement took place at the Corner Brook Northern Cod Seminar in August of 1979, held at the Glynmill Inn, Corner Brook, Newfoundland & Labrador. In making this decision Peckford stated,

Over the last number of years, corporate and other interests in mainland Canada have conducted an extensive lobbying campaign to influence the Government of Canada's policies in this regard. The result is that there appears to be great doubt in the minds of Federal bureaucrats as to the proper role of the Newfoundland inshore and longliner (or what might be called the middle distance) fleet. The balance is slowly but surely shifting to an emphasis on offshore trawlers. In 1979, for instance, only 56% of the Total Allowable Catch for these northeast cod stocks was allocated to the inshore fishery.

This can only mean disaster for our inshore fishermen and the many seasonal fish plants and communities which depend upon them. These policies must be reversed.

Peckford then went on to say, "It is the policy of my Government that about 85% of all northeastern cod should be taken by our inshore and middle-distance fleet. This fleet is backbone of the economy of hundreds of small fishing communities".

It was confirmation of a statement made by the Hon. Brian Tobin in 1978 at a speech to the St. John's Board of Trade (HOA, 2015). Further, the Newfoundland and Labrador government agreed with projections for the stock made at the Seminar and recommended the inshore fishery always catch 85 percent of the total (GNL, 1980).

The allowance followed a 1976 change in approach to fisheries management. In a ten-year strategic plan, the Canadian government stated, "The guiding principle in fishery management no longer would be the maximization of the crop sustainable over time but the best use of society's resources. 'Best use' is defined by the sum of net social benefits (personal income, occupational opportunity, consumer satisfaction and so on) derived from the fisheries and industries linked to them." (Leblanc, 1976)

The allowance is evident in management plans of the pre-moratorium era, and inshore catches reached 115,000 tonnes in 1982 (Steele et al, 1992). The allowance was built around ensuring the principles of the department were supported.

Vardy and Dunne (2003) reiterate these principles that guided fish management during this period, and ones that still hold true today. They write, "In addition to increasing the inshore allowance the province sought to have the allocation principles established by the federal minister used to protect the interests of the Newfoundland fishery. The 1984 Atlantic Groundfish Management Plan identified the allocation principles as being adjacency to the resource, the relative dependency of coastal communities and the various fleet sectors along with economic efficiency and fleet mobility. The province had emphasized the adjacency principle, along with historical dependence, to ensure that Northern cod was harvested principally for the benefit of the Newfoundland industry." The inshore allowance was a direct support mechanism for ensuring those who relied most on the resource were the ones to benefit.

Indeed, the Kirby Report (1982) had recommended an inshore allowance of 145,000 tonnes and is one of the first records to solidify this commitment in writing. Kirby stated that an allowance of 200,000 tonnes would be more in line with historical landings by the inshore fleet. The allowance was then confirmed at 115,000 tonnes. At the time of the moratorium in 1992, the offshore fleet had been removed from the fishery at 120,000 tonnes (Steele et al, 1992).

While some have argued the inshore lacked capacity to harvest this amount due to low landings during this time, Lear et al (1986) and Blackwood (1996) put this argument to rest with the political and environmental realities of the stock at the time.

Blackwood states, "The result was that the inshore sector, which was promised first priority in allocation and were supposed to get two thirds of the TAC was, by 1986, receiving only 43 per cent of the TAC as an allocation, and due to the low level of the stock and foreign harvest outside 200 miles, was accounting for only 26 per cent of the total catch" (Blackwood, 1996, p. 53). Similarly, Lear et al (1986) had earlier stated water temperature, lack of food availability and general lack of ecosystem productivity were responsible for the decrease in inshore landings.

Further, in a report resulting from the Royal Commission on Renewing and Strengthening our Place in Canada, entitled "New Arrangements for Fisheries Management in Newfoundland and Labrador," David Vardy and Eric Dunne backed up Blackwood's assertions.

When referring to the inshore's declining catches in the 1980s, Vardy and Dunne state, "The reason for this was that the biomass had been overestimated and the ability of inshore vessels to harvest a declining resource fell far short of the technical capacity of the offshore fleet to home in upon a shrinking biomass. The inshore allowance itself did not protect the stock or those who depended upon it as had been hoped."

In 1994, Richard Cashin chaired a task force on incomes and adjustment in the Atlantic fishery. In a subsequent article in the Financial Post (1994), it is stated that, "In his task force report, Cashin cautioned the return of a directed offshore cod fishery. On this point, Brian Tobin seems to agree. Both Tobin and Cashin have tossed out the figure of about 115,000 tonnes, a level the northern cod quota would have to reach before the offshore could return to those fishing grounds."

Further confirmation of the allowance was made by senior DFO official David Bevan on March 13, 2008 during a presentation to the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. Referring to

allocation policies, Bevan stated, “That policy was put in place as we made significant decisions, for example, on 2J3KL cod. The first 115,000 tonnes go to the inshore and the remainder would be shared between the inshore and the offshore.” (SCOFO, 2008)

Prior to the 2015 federal election, FFAW-Unifor submitted a questionnaire to each of the political parties requesting their responses to a number of questions. The 115,000-tonne inshore allowance was one of the key questions on the questionnaire. The Liberal Party of Canada reaffirmed their commitment to this allocation. The Party wrote,

A Trudeau-led Liberal government will re-affirm the federal commitment to allocate the first 115,000 MT of northern cod quota to the inshore harvesters so that, as the resource rebounds, the benefits of a future cod fishery flow to inshore harvesters and coastal communities.

The Liberal Party of Canada knows that we must be diligent and ensure that a resource rebound is real and sustainable, but when the stock achieves the proper threshold, we are committed to the policy that the first 115,000 MY will go to the inshore fleet.

We understand the fundamental importance of the cod fishery to Newfoundland and Labrador, and the importance of this commitment after the devastating effects of the cod collapse, which saw the largest layoffs in Canadian history. We must ensure that the future benefits of the cod fishery flow to the inshore harvesters and coastal communities, with spinoff benefits throughout the province.

In July 2016, then-Minister of Fisheries and Oceans Dominic LeBlanc held up the Liberal Party’s commitment. Minister Leblanc ensured the inshore harvesters of Newfoundland and Labrador that the federal Liberal government continue to support ensuring the first 115,000 tonnes of northern cod remain for inshore harvesters. This commitment has been re-stated and reiterated throughout the tenure of the Trudeau government.

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