



PRESS RELEASE

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Fish harvesters call for national reforms and fair treatment of B.C. fishermen

British Columbia fishermen need the same safeguards as Atlantic fishermen against corporate takeovers, Earle McCurdy, chair of the Canadian Council of Professional Fish Harvesters, said today.

The statement came at the wrap-up of the CCPFH's two-day general assembly in Vancouver. The Council, a federation of organizations, represents the majority of fishermen across the country. With about 140 delegates, the Vancouver meeting was the largest-ever planning session for Canadian fish harvesters.

On the Atlantic coast, policies known as the "owner-operator" and "fleet-separation" rules are designed to keep fishing licences in the hands of independent operators, Mr. McCurdy said. "Even those Atlantic rules need strengthening, but in B.C. there's no protection at all.

"Coastal communities supported by fishermen form part of our national heritage. We need policies to protect independent fishermen and their communities from coast to coast to coast."

Mr. McCurdy added that a series of reforms in training, health and safety, and human-resource planning should strengthen the position of all Canada's independent fishermen.

As a national sector council dealing with training and related matters, the CCPFH works to strengthen fishermen's role in shared stewardship of the resource and industry. The Vancouver meeting approved a human-resources plan to counter new threats to the fishing occupation.

Besides licence takeovers, challenges include shortfalls in training, and barriers to younger fishermen wanting to become owner-operators. "Current taxation regulations coupled with the high cost of boats and licences work against the sons and daughters of existing fishermen, in favour of larger corporations," Mr. McCurdy said. "These and other problems including resource and market conditions, and the lack of tax benefits comparable to those for other small businesses, threaten to decimate the next generation of fishermen."

The CCPFH human-resource plan calls for stronger policies to keep licences in the hands of independent operators, more effective training programs, and recognition of the experience and skills of fish harvesters – the industry's professionalization initiative.

"Despite its problems, the fishery has been a jewel for Canada," Mr. McCurdy said. "Our coastal communities deserve protection, and we seek co-operation from all levels of government to strengthen the fishing occupation."