



John Cummins
Official Opposition Critic
Fisheries and Oceans

News Release

May 8, 2003

Directive Sent to FRCC on Cod Closure Minister Failed to Silence Council

OTTAWA— “The Minister Of Fisheries attempted to intimidate the Fisheries Resource Conservation Council (FRCC) into writing a report that would call for the immediate closure of the cod fishery,” said John Cummins, M.P (Delta-South Richmond). “He failed. The FRCC would have none of it, rejecting out of hand a call for a complete shut down of the cod fishery.”

In a letter to the FRCC on December 10, 2002 the Minister made it very clear that he intended to close the cod fishery and intimated that the FRCC reports on Gulf and Northern Cod should contain supporting recommendations. It was not swayed by the Minister’s directive. Their reports ignored the Minister and went to great lengths to make clear that a total shutdown was counterproductive to the rebuilding of cod stocks.

DFO scientists have long complained of intimidation from the top but insiders say Fisheries Minister Tibault is the first and only Minister who has violated the independence of the FRCC.

The FRCC was created in the wake of the initial cod collapse and moratorium in the early nineties. It was a response to the widely held view that DFO scientists had been muzzled and their advice distorted. The FRCC was to provide the Minister of Fisheries with independent analysis of DFO scientific advice and to consult directly with fishermen with regard to that scientific analysis.

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador and the Liberal Members of Parliament from the province have been under pressure from the Minister to fall into line. The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has remained defiant while Liberal Members of Parliament from the province have been largely silenced.

When the Minister came to the Fisheries Committee on May 1st to defend his actions, few Members from Newfoundland and Labrador bothered to show up. Mr. Thibault faced little challenge from Liberals on his decision to ignore the FRCC and close the cod fishery. The main demand from Liberal Committee members that day was from Ontario Liberals demanding more support for the sea lamprey control program on the Great Lakes.

“Both the Liberal Minister of Fisheries and the Liberal Members of Parliament from Newfoundland and Labrador should be held to account for their actions in this shameful affair,” Cummins concluded.

Contact: John Cummins, M.P.
(613) 992-2957 or cell (604) 970-0937