



John Cummins, M.P.
Delta-Richmond East
www.johncummins.ca

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Bureaucrats Seek Power to Jail Fishermen

OTTAWA—“The Minister of Fisheries is trying to slide through Parliament an amendment to the *Fisheries Act* allowing for the jailing of fishermen who might fail to meet a condition attached to their fishing licence by Department of Fisheries bureaucrats,” said John Cummins, M.P. (Delta-Richmond East).

“Bureaucrats have no business casually attaching conditions to licences that dictate who can fish, where they fish and how much they can catch, conditions that if breached can send result in jail time,” said Cummins.

“I am not prepared to give bureaucrats a blank cheque to legislate. No one in Canada should face jail time unless they have broken a law or regulation authorized by Parliament,” Cummins noted.

The problem in the fishery is not that Fisheries Officers lack the power to protect fish stocks through the enforcement of the *Fisheries Act* and its regulations. The problem is that fisheries bureaucrats in Ottawa have in some cases ordered Fishery Officers not to enforce the law and in other cases the Ottawa-based bureaucrats have reduced the number of Fishery Officers in the field to the point where there is no one patrolling the water.

“Bureaucrats do not need more power to intimidate fishermen; they need to get out of the way and let Fishery Officers do their job,” said Cummins. “If Fishery Officers need more resources then I support giving it to them. If Fishery Officers need better regulations to assist them in tracking the illegal movement of fish, then I support additional regulations under the *Fisheries Act*. I do not support giving faceless bureaucrats the power to do almost anything they want without any accountability to Parliament.

The Newfoundland cod disappeared not because Fishery Officers lacked the power to control the fishery, but because the Department of Fisheries lacked the will to protect fish stocks.

The same tragedy played itself out on the Fraser River in British Columbia last summer when the majority of the spawners went missing before reaching the spawning grounds on the upper reaches of the Fraser. The disaster happened, the evidence shows, not because of deficiencies in the Fishery Act but because bureaucrats failed to ensure the Fisheries Act and its regulations were enforced.

“Let’s give Fishery Officers the resources they need to protect fish stocks. Giving unlimited powers to unaccountable bureaucrats to write their own laws on quotas and other controversial matters is asking for trouble,” concluded Cummins.

Contact: John Cummins, M.P.
(613) 992-2957, (cell) (604) 970-0937, (604) 940-8040
or www.johncummins.ca