

# Canada's Strategy to Combat Global Overfishing and Improve International Fisheries Governance

Canadian and International  
Qualitative Research

**St. John's, NL – May 4, 2005**



Environics Research Group

# Environics Research

- established in 1970
- one of Canada's leading public opinion research firms
- based in Toronto, with offices in Ottawa and Calgary
- specializes in qualitative and quantitative research on public affairs issues

# Rationale for the Research

- Overfishing important issue both for Canada and the world community
- DFO wishes to play key role domestically and internationally in raising awareness of this issue to move toward solutions to the problem.
- To gain a better understanding of the views, attitudes and perceptions of the overfishing issue.

# Research Objectives

- Environics Research conducted focus groups in Canada and Europe on behalf of DFO
- Research objective:
  - To gauge public understanding and stakeholder views on the overfishing issue.
- Focus groups provide exploratory, interpretive research .
- **Note:** qualitative research explores why people have the views they do and how they react to new information. This is not statistical data. Findings are only directional.

# Canadian Research Methodology

- 12 focus groups conducted in December 2004 – two, two-hour sessions.
- Four cities and two fishing communities: Toronto, ON; Calgary, AB; Nanaimo, BC; Halifax, NS; St. John's, NL and Clarenville, NL
- One session with general public and one session with fisheries stakeholders in each coastal location; general population at both sessions at in-land locations

# Key Research Findings - Canada

## ➤ Overall attitude towards fisheries

- Canadians show a firm attachment to the notion of a healthy, sustainable fishery, whether or not fisheries are relevant to them personally.
- Stronger importance placed on fisheries to Canada for environmental and economic reasons, as well as a recognition of the importance of fish to Canada's historical development.

# Key Research Findings – Canada

## ➤ Opinions on overfishing

- Awareness of overfishing problems is almost universal; creates images of drag nets, rogue trawlers in Canadian waters and oceans devoid of fish.
- Concerns about overfishing related both to economics and to the environment; participants express the need for balance between the economy and environment.

# Key Research Findings – Canada

## ➤ Opinions on overfishing

- General population participants were concerned and reacted emotionally to unemployment rates, but also saw overfishing in the context of a threat to the global ecosystem.
- A widely held view is that overfishing is really about foreign vessels invading Canadian waters and fishing illegally.



# Key Research Findings – Canada

## ➤ Impressions of Regional Fisheries Management Organizations:

- Stakeholders generally aware of NAFO and other regional fisheries management bodies.
- Stakeholders in NL were especially critical of the effectiveness of NAFO to deter non-compliance in the NAFO Regulatory Area.
- Among general public, awareness of these organizations almost non-existent.

# Key Research Findings – Canada

- **Canada's strategy seen as a positive step in right direction**
  - Initial awareness of DFO strategy to deal with overfishing was very low. Participants glad to learn about what was being done.
  - Support for Canada in leadership role, but cynical about commitment and ability to lead by example.
  - Long-term, international approach: diplomacy preferred response.
  - Need for balance: economic viability and holistic/ecosystems' approach.

# Key Research Findings – Canada

- **Canada's strategy seen as a positive step in right direction**
  - Support stronger punishment.
  - Desire for more information (esp. from media). Education important part of solution.
  - Interest in understanding science behind decision-making.
  - Domestic rigour (leading by example) seen as essential to ensure international credibility.

# Conclusions – Canadian Research

## ➤ Surprises

- Overall **consistency** among stakeholders and general population.

## ➤ Key Findings

- *Progress, Punishment/Penalties, Promotion*

## ➤ Participants called on government to:

- promote the issue, focus on enforcement and punishment efforts;
- work with allies to broaden focus from NAFO;
- lead international advocacy;

# Conclusions – Canadian Research

(cont'd) Participants called on government to:

- provide frank information to stakeholders – regular, relevant information; and
- demonstrate continued commitment to domestic fishery while pursuing global objectives.

*“If we’re not going to lead, who will?”*

# European Research Methodology

- Nine focus groups conducted in February and March 2005
- Two, two-hour sessions in each area with:
  - General public and fisheries stakeholders in two important fishing areas in Europe: Aveiro, Portugal and Vigo, Spain
  - General public and environmental stakeholders in a 'Green' European country: Stockholm, Sweden
  - General public in Boulogne-sur-mer, France and Lisbon, Portugal.

# Key Research Findings – Europe

## ➤ Overall impressions on fisheries

- Assessments of the relative importance of fisheries vary by location and by country.
- It was universally understood to be very important to specific regions and communities in each country.
- The fishery was also viewed in all locations to have strong historical and traditional ties.

# Key Research Findings – Europe

## ➤ Overall impressions on fisheries

- Participants saw growing role for the EU in fisheries issues; perhaps at the expense of national considerations.
- Felt voice in EU not heard on fishery issues (esp. in smaller countries).
- But looked to EU for solutions (such as legal homogeneity) and enforcement.



# Key Research Findings – Europe

## ➤ Opinions on overfishing

- Punishment should be harsh; much more of a ‘fit the crimes’ focus; measured against value of catch.
- Interestingly, whereas France thought fining flag State of violating vessel good solution; Sweden adamant that country should not be fined (implicated all citizens). Desire not to make fishers themselves suffer – only the ship owners.
- Consumer – rising cost mentioned; labelling also top-of-mind.

# Key Research Findings – Europe

## ➤ Opinions on overfishing

- Importance of research and science highlighted in every session: concern that industry doesn't follow its recommendations.
- Canada's interest viewed by some as self-serving, but there was also some appreciation Canada taking on initiative.

# Key Research Findings – Europe

## ➤ On Canada's strategy

- International co-operation well supported notion; many asked what others were doing. Others supported Canada's strategy, but only if Canada worked with other countries.
- Canada is highly regarded as a “fair”, “democratic”, “peace-loving” country.
- Some impression that Canada by being independent of the EU has more ability to take the lead.

# Key Research Findings – Europe

## ➤ On Canada's strategy

- Call for 'human reaction to problem' – what is the 'human' face of this story. Also support production of a documentary, and public information campaign.
- Supportive of public information campaign.

# Key Research Findings – Europe

## ➤ Impressions of Regional Fisheries Management Organizations:

- Stakeholders generally aware of NAFO and other regional fisheries management bodies.
- Among general public, awareness of these organizations almost non-existent, though many participants assumed there must be some sort of international body to regulate fishing in international waters.

# Key Research Findings – Europe

## ➤ Impressions of Regional Fisheries Management Organizations:

- Participants wanted to understand more about which countries belonged to NAFO and which did not.
- Also desire to know what happened to non-member countries that tried to fish in the NRA.
- Many under the impression that non-signatories could do as they pleased in terms of fishing in international waters.

# Key Research Findings – Europe

## ➤ Impressions of Regional Fisheries Management Organizations:

- General public assumed that NAFO regulations too weak and not enforced aggressively enough.
- The idea that violating vessels were punished by their home countries was considered to be open to abuse and probably leading to penalties that were far too lenient.

# Conclusions – European Research

- **Key Findings:**
- Support for Canada's strategy **in partnership** with other countries.
- International co-operation well supported notion; many asked what others were doing.
- Harsh punishment
- Most appreciate Canada addressing issue; but some suspicious of motives.
- Question activities of their governments; uncertainty EU role vs. home country.
- Recognize many 1<sup>st</sup> world countries to blame for overfishing.



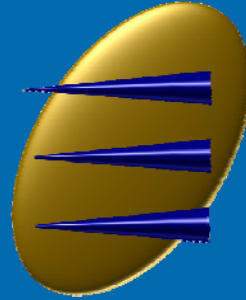
# Canada and Europe: Commonalities

## ➤ **Key Findings:**

- High level of concern about oceans and fish stocks from a conservation and environmental point of view.
- Emotional bond to the idea of fisheries and its cultural and historical significance. Trust in fishers.
- Support for the idea of a sustainable fishery.
- Belief in the need for multilateral cooperation.
- Strong support for tough penalties for those who break rules. Need for deterrence.
- Belief that the current measures are not adequate.

# Canada and Europe: Differences

- Canadians are passionate about overfishing and have seen the consequences up close (i.e., collapse of NL cod fishery).
- Europeans consider shrinking fish stocks as a general ecological problem, but it is less of an immediate issue.
- Canadians expect concrete action from their government; Europeans uncertain about what they can expect from their national government, as part of the EU.
- Canadians see this as being very much a "Canadian" issue since rich high seas fishing grounds are directly off the Canadian coast; Europeans are more removed from the areas most affected.



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