

MARC LORTIE
Canadian Ambassador in Spain

“It’s time to cooperate with Galicia”

“We want owners of fishing vessels to establish agreements with Canadian companies”

L. Piñero / VIGO

After a long diplomatic career, Marc Lortie arrived in Spain eighteen months ago as Canadian Ambassador with the aim of re-establishing the links between the two countries that had deteriorated after the so-called “Turbot War”, which broke out because of the seizure of the Vigo fishing vessel “Estai”. He will be in Vigo today to offer some fifty officials and businessmen a taste of some typical Canadian products, in a gesture aimed at re-establish the confidence and cooperation with Galicia that were lost after the fishing incidents eleven years ago, although he points out that relations between the two countries in connection with fishing have existed for more than two centuries.

“Do you think the “Turbot War” is now a forgotten conflict?”

“It ended eleven years ago. The time has come to cooperate fully with Galicia, mainly with the Galician fishing industry, which is very important to us.”

“However, there are still problems because the Galician fleet that is fishing has shrunk by a third in barely three years.”

“This is a problem of fish stocks that affects not only Galician fishing boats, but other fleets too, including our own, and is one that the regional associations we belong to, such as Nafo, will have to resolve.”

“The four-year plan to reduce fishing ends in 2007. Do you think the scientists will increase quotas then?”

“Canadian biologists are working day and night to determine the state of fish stocks. The quotas they establish will take the situation of the stocks into account. The Spanish and Canadian governments are exchanging scientists to ensure that the study’s conclusions are unbiased. The objective is to reform Nafo so that it can deal with the present situation.

“Galician fishing boat owners claim that you blame the other countries’ fleets for exhausting the Nafo fishing ground, while the richest fishing ground, the Grand Banks within the 200-mile exclusive economic zone where only Canada can fish, is being devastated.”

The rules governing the 200-mile limit are very strict, but the situation has become extremely difficult due to the lack of fish stocks. We are experiencing the same situation in international and national waters.

“Do the seal culls have anything to do with recovery of the Canadian fishing ground?”

“Canadian scientists are not yet clear as to whether there is a direct relationship between the scarcity of fish and overpopulation of seals.

“So, what’s the justification for the culls?”

“Seal hunting is very strictly regulated in Canada. We have a population of six million seals and in the east there’s been a tradition of hunting them for centuries. The rules are very restrictive, and it is the scientists who establish the guidelines in Newfoundland and the Gulf of St. Laurence.

“What stage are commercial relations between Spanish and Canadian enterprises at?”

“We are witnessing a spectacular stage, since transactions are increasing at 20% a year.”

“And with Galician enterprises?”

“We have immense interest in the fishing industry, so last year we participated in Conxemar. We want to invite Galician enterprises to Canada to establish trading links.

“And owners of fishing vessels too?”

“Owners especially, so that they can set up joint ventures with Canadian companies.”

“What Canadian products are your guests going to try in Vigo today?”

“Ceviche of Atlantic scallops with coral, lobster tails from Halifax, prairie bison meat and Quebec maple sugar tartlets.”