

**Speaking notes for
Hon. Rick Doucet
Minister of Fisheries**

**Evening Session
New Brunswick Fisheries Summit**

**Delta Beauséjour
Moncton, N.B.**

Friday, Feb. 23, 2007 – 6:00 p.m.

Good evening everyone. **Bonsoir, Mesdames et Messieurs.**

Thank you for setting aside some of your valuable time, especially during a weekend, to join us here in Moncton for the first-ever New Brunswick Fisheries Summit.

After the election in September, our government lived up to its commitment of creating a stand-alone Department of Fisheries with a single-minded focus on the fishery.

The organization of this Summit, within just a little over four months of taking office, demonstrates our resolve to make the fishery a priority, once again.

I am honoured to be the minister of such a dedicated team of employees who are energized, excited and eager to be part of making improvements to our valuable fishing and seafood processing industry.

Your participation at the Summit speaks to your commitment to an industry, which has long been the economic backbone in many of our coastal communities.

It also tells me that you are interested and willing to work together to address the challenges faced by the industry.

And that is what this Summit is really all about, working together.

We chose the theme "*Common Vision-Common Future*" to drive home that message of the importance of greater collaboration.

I think you would agree with me, that too often and for far too long, the different partners who make up the fishery sector have been working in isolation.

Sure, you know each other and sometimes you do business together. But most times, your focus is on your own bottom line and what you need to do to turn in another successful year.

For the record, I include the various levels of government when I say more communication needs to take place.

That is why I am very pleased the Federal Minister of Fisheries, the Honourable Loyola Hearn has agreed to attend the Summit and to co-chair the meeting with me.

Minister Hearn was delayed leaving Ottawa as the House of Commons was expected to proceed today with second reading of Bill C-45. He is expected to join us a little later this evening

Let me take a moment to quickly address Bill C-45. As a piece of legislation that almost dates back to Confederation, the Fisheries Act is long overdue for a modernization, so we support the initiative.

We have started collecting feedback from our own fishing industry. At the same time, we are working with our counterparts from the other Atlantic Canada provinces preparing a coordinated approach.

New Brunswick will make its views on C-45 known, when the time comes to appear before a House of Commons Standing Committee.

Now let me return to the subject of tonight's discussion, the Summit.

Over the past several weeks, a steering committee of officials from our two Departments has been working hard, planning for this event.

I would also like to point out that Fisheries and Oceans Canada is sharing in the costs associated with this Summit.

From our perspective, the need for consultation and cooperation among the various components of the New Brunswick industry also extends beyond our boundaries.

On that note, I want to welcome the Honourable Jim Bagnall, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Aquaculture from Prince Edward Island.

Also present this weekend are officials from Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec and Nova Scotia.

It is my sincere hope that, with our neighbouring jurisdictions, we can also work together on taking advantage of opportunities that lie ahead of us, in a spirit of mutual cooperation, rather than looking at issues that divide us.

And last but not least, I certainly want to welcome the participants and observers who agreed to take part in this Summit.

I believe we have a very good cross-section of individuals who adequately and fairly represent the various sectors of the fishing industry.

So why are we having this summit? What is the purpose of bringing everyone together? What do we hope to accomplish at the end of the day?

Those are all fair questions.

Let me address the why question first.

The New Brunswick Fisheries Summit represents the first time various participants from the fishery are meeting under one roof to talk about the state of their industry.

More than focusing on the past or present, we need to talk about the future. We need to go beyond talking about next season, or next year. Our objective is to get everyone talking about a vision, a plan, for the long-term viability of this important resource sector.

Last week, as Premier Shawn Graham delivered his first State of the Province Address, he laid out our government's goal of achieving self sufficiency over the next 20 years.

Premier Graham talked about the importance of expanding the economy, increasing economic development efforts and increasing export capabilities.

These objectives are parallel to the process we are starting here today at the Summit - a renewal of the seafood sector.

Preparation for the Summit started in November as we prepared to hold a series of consultation meetings around the province.

I felt it was important to hear first hand from the harvesters, processors and marketers, who make their livelihood off of the ocean.

My staff took comprehensive notes. The issues and priorities you raised have become part of a very busy agenda that we will tackle together tomorrow.

What is clear is that the industry faces big challenges.

Some of those challenges come from your own backyard. There are decreasing catches, rising overhead costs, aging fleets, not to mention aging fishermen.

Challenges also come from outside our borders.

New players, coming into the market, are going after the same seafood dollar that we rely upon.

The customers we sell our products to are demanding better quality and a more stable supply to meet their own customers' demands.

The New Brunswick seafood industry being very much export-dependant, wild fluctuations in exchange rates have also presented challenges over the past.

I believe the solutions for facing these challenges, head on, will come from the very people sitting here with me inside this room.

We need to pool our ideas. We need a collective approach to identifying the foundations of a smart action plan.

The question of where we go from here, what we do next, will hopefully become clearer at the end of the day.

I am not going to attempt to prejudge the outcome of our discussions.

I want to make it very clear however that the Summit is not an end in itself.

It is in fact the starting point of a discussion that is long overdue, a discussion that I hope will lead to a better understanding of the prevalent issues, as well as to concrete recommendations on how to improve the situation for the benefit of the many New Brunswick communities and residents involved in the fishing industry.

It is my belief that the status quo is not acceptable and will not work. The industry needs much more synergy than what we have now.

Your participation in the Summit is an indication you feel the same, that the industry is at a crossroads and we need to work together on a clear plan for the future.

If we want the fishery to continue being an economic engine for our coastal communities it is time we all get in the same boat together and start pulling in the same direction.

Thank you. **Merci!**