

PEI considers next move on fisheries

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SUMMERSIDE — The Supreme Court of Canada has rejected PEI's lawsuit challenging the authority of Canada's fisheries minister to set fish quotas.

The province's new Liberal Fisheries Minister, Allan Campbell, said Thursday's ruling did not come as a surprise.

“Our government felt that this has always been a political action wrapped up in a legal action,” he said.

Mr. Campbell said he needed more information about what the ruling means before deciding upon a response.

“I will have to sit down with our legal team and have them explain it to me.”

The lawsuit, launched by the previous Progressive Conservative government in February, 2005, argued that the federal process for distributing resources was unfair and arbitrary.

When Ottawa allocated herring to New Brunswick seiners in a zone that Island fishermen considered theirs, it triggered protests and wharf blockades.

PEI's Supreme Court ruled that it did not have the jurisdiction to hear the case and referred it to the higher court.

Now that the suit has been dismissed, an Island Liberal MP is challenging the province's former fisheries minister, Kevin MacAdam, to take action.

“I'd like to seem him use his influence,” said Wayne Easter, noting that Mr. MacAdam now works for Peter MacKay, the federal minister responsible for the Island.

Mr. Easter said Mr. MacAdam could get Mr. MacKay to put pressure on Federal Fisheries Minister Loyola Hearn to address concerns about unfair treatment from Ottawa over quota allocations and licenses.

All the province and Mr. MacAdam have accomplished since 2005 was to generate hefty fees for lawyers, Mr. Easter said.

“There was no way PEI was ever going to win an appeal with the federal government,” he said. “We spent \$600,000 to end up exactly where we were.”

PEI Fisheries Minister Allan Campbell said he wants to sit down with Mr. Hearn next month and discuss long-festering fisheries management issues.

Earlier this month, Island fishermen learned that their share of the region's halibut allocation would fall to less than 2 per cent, while Quebec would get close to 60 per cent.

Island fishermen complain that they have been shortchanged in allocations of snow crab, Gulf shrimp and tuna.

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