

Land and the People

Directions Read about one problem facing the Canadian people. Then answer the questions that follow.

Who Can Fish?

Before the arrival of the Europeans, Native Canadians in the Atlantic Provinces and Quebec fished in what are today the waters of the North Atlantic. The Native Canadian fishers harvested lobsters, cod, and other seafood to survive. With the arrival of the Europeans, fishing became an important industry in eastern Canada. Large companies or commercial fisheries harvested millions of tons of fish over the years. In fact so many fish had been harvested by the late twentieth century that the Canadian government declared the region overfished. The government then passed laws to limit the amount of seafood that could be harvested.

Since the Canadian government's decision to limit fishing, many people in Canada have been affected. Both the Native Canadians and people of European descent who depend on fishing have lost income. Some of the Native Canadians in the region believe that the laws of the Canadian government do not apply to them. They claim that treaties signed by their nations and Canada long ago allow them to continue fishing. Many Native Canadians continue to fish the waters of the North Atlantic. Several people have been arrested for fishing and put on trial by the government.

In 1999 one trial went all the way to Canada's Supreme Court. Canada's highest court ruled that the 34 Native Canadian nations could still fish when and where they wanted. Many Canadians disagreed, and violence broke out. Some Native Canadians found their fishing equipment vandalized. Others were arrested by the Canadian government for overfishing because the laws were not changed.

Fishing is an important industry to the people of Canada. Both Native Canadians and European Canadians in the Atlantic Provinces depend upon it for their livelihood. The Native Canadian nations believe that it is their right to fish as much as they want. Others worry that these nations will overfish the region and destroy the future of the fishing industry.



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