

B.C. to reap benefits in proposed Canada-EU pact: minister

Province's forestry, seafood, agricultural and investment sectors cited by feds

BY BRIAN MORTON, VANCOUVER SUN APRIL 28, 2012 3:05 AM

B.C. could benefit from a proposed Canada-European Union free-trade pact, particularly the forestry, seafood, agriculture, services and investment sectors, Heritage Minister James Moore said in Vancouver Friday.

"We know that companies like this can compete and win in global markets," Moore said during a news conference at the Canadian Fishing Company.

"A Canada-EU trade agreement will produce success for this critical sector and directly benefit workers and families who rely on it here in B.C."

Moore, who was joined by several B.C. business leaders at Friday's conference, made the comments as cabinet ministers, senators and Conservative MPs fanned out across the country Friday, selling the merits of the proposed free-trade pact in 18 different events.

The events focused on local economic issues affected by the deal including shipping in Nova Scotia, fishing in New Brunswick, financial services in Ontario, and the energy sector in Alberta.

In B.C., Moore said the agreement would bring a 20percent boost in bilateral trade and a \$12-billion annual increase to Canada's economy, and create 80,000 jobs nationally.

He said the agreement would increase sales of B.C.'s fish and other seafood products to the EU, which now stand at about \$55 million annually, by eliminating tariffs that now average 11 per cent for Canadian seafood products.

In the forestry sector he said an EU market that now receives \$326

million worth of B.C. wood and wood products would be expanded.

Tariffs would also be eliminated on B.C.'s agricultural exports to Europe, now worth \$35 million annually.

"The current tariff on Canadian smoked salmon makes it uncompetitive," said Seafood Producers Association of B.C. secretary-treasurer Chris Sporer. He said the levy can be as high as 24 per cent.

"There's a lot of potential for [increased] trade for smoked salmon. And there might be similar opportunities for frozen albacore tuna," added Sporer.

Canadian Fishing Company vice-president Rob Morley agreed. "We export to 28 countries and the European Union is already an important market for us.

"When [tariffs] are eliminated, it makes us more competitive, vis-a-vis the U.S."

Shachi Kurl, director of provincial affairs, B.C. and Yukon, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, said a trade pact with Europe would not only eliminate tariffs for many of the CFIB's 10,000 B.C. members, but also simplify regulations.

However, critics and opposition parties have said the government hasn't provided enough details about the pact to Parliament or the public to determine whether it is in Canada's best interest.

"Unfortunately, anti-trade activists continue to spread falsehoods about trade," said International Trade Minister Ed Fast. "These are the same falsehoods spread about the NAFTA negotiations a generation ago by the same groups."

Critics of the deal on both sides of the Atlantic argue parts of the agreement could have effects on domestic jobs, make the privatization of public services a likelihood and increase the prices of consumer goods and pharmaceutical drugs.

Dozens of Canadian cities have asked the government for

exemptions from the agreement, worried the pact will limit their ability to award contracts to local organizations.

The marketing blitz comes days after an EU representative said the deal was three-quarters complete and expected to be finalized by the end of the year.