

## OPINION

## NDP &amp; STRATEGY

# What is Mulcair waiting for?

By failing to deliver on one of his strengths in more forcefully dominating the political centre and reaching out to Liberal supporters, Tom Mulcair risks losing everything the party has built in the last decade once a new, permanent appealing Liberal leader takes over.



BY MICHAEL QAQISH

OTTAWA—It was October last year when Tom Mulcair finally made it official and added his name to a long list of leadership candidates looking to replace Jack Layton. Coming from a province with a weak NDP foundation and low memberships numbers, Mulcair took a long hard look at his odds before making that decision and putting his political career on the line.

The calculated move indubitably involved a gamble with front-runner Brian Topp seemingly well ahead with party establishment endorsements at every corner.

But the fearless and politically savvy Mulcair knew he still had a chance to turn the tide around, despite a limited time frame and significant disadvantage with NDP memberships in La Belle Province,

let alone across the country where he lacked a public profile.

At the time, the vast majority of members were split into two camps. Topp supporters were mainly comprised of the old guard and Layton loyalists. The other members were more open to a reformed NDP and some of those lined up behind Mulcair voluntarily while others were actively sought out in an unprecedented manner by his capable team.

One of the reasons people flocked towards Mulcair was the fact that he was a tested politician who could easily take on Harper or Rae. More importantly, NDP supporters quickly discovered his canny ability to appeal to many outside their traditional base, which was a necessity for the new leader. These characteristics made Mulcair stand out from the rest.

It hasn't been a year since being officially sworn in as opposition leader; nonetheless, it's time for a preliminary assessment of Mulcair's performance to date. Has he managed to deliver on those expectations or has he failed?

Unlike his predecessors from the Liberals, Mulcair has been successful in avoiding being painted with the Conservative brush as was quickly done with Ignatieff and Dion. And it's not to say there was no opportunity to do so.

The Conservatives attempted to put all the spin they could on Mulcair's comments pertaining to Dutch disease—a reference to a booming gas sector in the Netherlands during the 1960s which led to declines in the manufacturing industry—to the current situation between eastern and western Canada. For whatever reason, those efforts seemed to go nowhere and if anything helped Mulcair win that battle by elevating the level of political debate in the House. Sustainable energy and the development of Alberta's oil sands wasn't something the Conservatives would ever want to discuss, but it dominated for weeks in the House. He made similar comments at a recent rally for his candidate in the Calgary Centre byelection, which shows his passion for the environment.

This was in stark comparison

to previous Liberal opposition leaders who were dead upon arrival due to Conservative spin doctors working their magic.

Part of the reason Mulcair may have been successful in getting away with those comments is his ability to fight back by hitting the air waves and controlling his messaging directly with Canadians.

Unfortunately, after testing the waters with this bold idea, Mulcair has laid low in the past few months and it's hard to think of any other major proposals or accomplishments. His supporters may argue that significant groundwork is happening behind the scenes, but Quebec commentators have unanimously suggested that nearly all of the rookie MPs elected in that province are non-existent in their ridings. And that is certainly a recipe for disaster.

If the NDP wants to maintain their seat status in the House and advance it, the party would be wise to ensure their rookie MPs spent more time in their ridings rather than Ottawa's ByWard Market.

The last and potentially big-

gest challenge for Mulcair will involve the new leader of the Liberal Party.

While an interim Liberal leader has made things arguably easier for the NDP to capture media attention, Rae's political stature has been anything but interim—despite that, Mulcair has fared well in that regard.

But by failing to deliver on one of his strengths in more forcefully dominating the political centre and reaching out to Liberal supporters, Mulcair risks losing everything the party has built in the last decade once a new, permanent appealing Liberal leader takes over. What is he waiting for?

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## OPINION

## OCEANS &amp; ECONOMIES

# Canadian Ocean economies at risk from GHG emissions



BY RASHID SUMAILA

Canada is blessed with the longest coastline in the world and one of the largest ocean estates of any country. Ocean fish stocks are among the planet's most important renewable natural resources. Beyond playing a crucial role in marine ecosystems, fish support human well-being through employment in fishing, processing, and retail services, as well as food security for many coastal regions.

Gross revenues from ocean fisheries worldwide are estimated at about U.S. \$85-billion annually, generating economic and household income impacts throughout the world economy of about U.S. \$240-billion and U.S. \$63-billion annually. The equivalent numbers for Canada are U.S. \$2.8-billion, U.S. \$9.1-billion and U.S. \$2.9-billion.

In addition to these commercial values, fish is a good source of protein, micro-nutrients, minerals and

essential fatty acids, and globally provides three billion people up to 15 per cent of their dietary animal protein needs. In Canada, many coastal communities, especially First Nations groups, rely heavily on fish for food and employment, in addition to their cultural and ceremonial importance.

Ensuring that our oceans and fish stocks are healthy and sustainable long-term is important to the Canadian and global economy and identity. Achieving healthy oceans has always been difficult, as they are plagued by the historical problems of over-fishing, pollution, and habitat destruction and loss. Global warming, ocean acidification and deoxygenating are new threats. Combined with the longstanding threats, these new issues are creating formidable challenges to this important animal protein source, and the economics of the businesses and communities that depend on them. As amply demonstrated by the collapse of northern cod off Newfoundland, the depletion of fish stocks can have devastating effects on human well-being.

Recently, the ocean has become warmer, with an increase in aver-

age temperature of 0.2°C at the top 300 metres of the ocean between the 1950s and 1990s. As the ocean warms, not only will the sea ice extent in the Arctic and other areas of the world continue to decrease, but the pH of surface ocean waters will also decrease, making it more acidic and less oxygenated, resulting in changes in productivity of the living resources contained in them.

Changes in temperature and ocean chemistry directly affect the physiology, growth and reproduction of marine fish species. For example, fish in warmer temperatures are expected to have a smaller maximum body size and smaller size at first maturity. Fish with smaller bodies that live in warmer environments are expected to suffer higher natural mortality rates. Current studies suggest that species' responses to more acidic water may vary between species, with invertebrates such as shell fish, currently important to Canadian fisheries, impacted more while the effect on finfish is more uncertain.

Given the predicted biophysical and ecological effects of the new threats, they will affect the economics of fishing because both the quan-

tity and quality of marine fish catch would be impacted, through changes in: price and value of fish catch; fishing costs; fishers' incomes; earnings to fishing companies; resource rent (i.e., the surplus after all costs, including 'normal' profits, have been covered); and economic impacts throughout the economy.

For example, during the 1997-98 El Niño, Chilean and Peruvian pelagic marine landings declined by about 50 per cent, resulting in a drop in fishmeal export values by about USD 8.2 billion. This huge drop generated negative economic effects and caused severe hardship (e.g. lost jobs, incomes and earnings) in the two countries.

To tackle these new threats to our oceans, we need to fill existing knowledge gaps that prevent a comprehensive understanding of the full range of impacts that ocean warming could have on the economics of fisheries. Given that climate change is already affecting fisheries, it is important for both public and private stakeholders to help fisheries address the new threats. Maintaining more abundant populations is a way to increase their capacity to adapt

to environmental change. Hence, solving the over-fishing problem is fundamental.

Governments have generally been reactive rather than anticipatory in their response to declining fishing opportunities, with huge economic consequences. Given the scale of the anticipated effects of ocean warming on fisheries, reactive measures are likely to be very costly.

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions would substantially diminish the ecological impacts of ocean warming on fish stocks and thus minimize its economic effects. Also, the cost of adapting to the new threats would be lower with reduced emissions. Thus, it is important for all with interests in the health of our oceans to push for lower greenhouse emissions.

*Rashid Sumaila is professor and director of the Fisheries Centre & the Fisheries Economics Research Unit at UBC. On Tuesday Nov. 27, in Room 216-N Centre Block at 12 noon, Dr. Sumaila will be presenting at the 'Oceans on the Hill' speakers series hosted by WWF and the All-Party Ocean Caucus.*

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