State-subsidized destruction at sea

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But at least the campaign has illuminated some of the ways in which the "tragedy of the commons" is accelerating in the world’s oceans - and the way governments choose not to interfere.

The United Nations General Assembly, that most ineffectual of bodies, continued talking this week about banning high-seas bottom trawling, which scrapes the sea-floor bare, destroying habitat and coral. As the UN devotes two weeks to the issue many good lunches will be consumed - perhaps the Chilean sea bass? - by diplomats. But it turns out the fix is in: A number of influential countries aggressively subsidize this kind of fishing, and most of them are not likely to be deterred.

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It’s odd to see Canada on the wrong side of an issue like this. The limp excuse, from federal Fisheries Minister Loyola Hearn, is that the ban would be tough to enforce.

That’s true enough, but it’s no excuse. If the world doesn’t mobilize against destructive fisheries practices - of which this one is fairly minor, actually - then those distressing predictions about the utter collapse of the world’s fisheries will come true all too soon.

Surely Canada can do better.