

*Government Orders*

fined \$5,000 at most. That is a joke. If he brings in a load of fish worth 10 times that amount, what is \$5,000?

When I referred earlier to the cost of doing business, that is what I was talking about. If he brings in that amount of fish for big dollars and all he has to face by way of a fine is \$5,000, then why not? The present act is almost equivalent to encouraging the illegal dumping of fish at sea.

That is what the trawlermen in Canso told me when I visited them in February and March after my appointment. The trawlermen in Newfoundland talked to me about misreporting northern cod. Given the fact that we had to reduce drastically the quotas in order to protect the future fishery, we literally encouraged these people to do so by not imposing penalties high enough. It was simply considered a cost of doing business.

This is why it is proposed in the bill that for these offences the current maximum of \$5,000 be increased to \$100,000 on summary conviction and \$500,000 on indictment. That is a drastic increase. Those who choose to violate the Fisheries Act and jeopardize the future of fishermen in Atlantic Canada, as well as on the Pacific coast, those who choose to take the livelihoods away from the kids in Atlantic Canada who may become fishermen, and some of them will, they will pay for it.

I think the decision as to the laying of an information from summary conviction offence which can bring a fine of up to \$100,000 to one by indictment which would bring a fine of up to \$500,000 is an important step in our efforts to try to rebuild and conserve the fish stocks.

There are also options in this bill for second and subsequent offences to include fines and/or imprisonment of up to one year on summary conviction and up to two years on indictment.

The government decided because it was asked by the fishermen. I do not want to pretend that I am standing here as the great minister of fisheries who has decided all alone to do this. No, this is the Government of Canada, and this was started by my predecessor, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, to answer the concerns of the fishing industry all across Canada that these fines for general fishing offences should be increased.

• (1640)

A lot of people complained about the fact that fishery officers were not really helped by the present act in that you could obstruct a fishery officer and get a fine of \$100. Anyone wishing to violate the act knowingly could obstruct the fishery officer. The cost of doing business for the fun of it would be a maximum fine of \$100. This will go up to \$100,000 on summary conviction and \$500,000 on indictment. There will be a big difference. I just cannot see the effect this will have on our fishery officers.

It is normal that when people talk about the fisheries they only look at the fishermen. They never look at the whole apparatus behind the fishing industry that makes it work. The real people out there whose livelihood is tied to the fish resource have to rely on good fishery officers. The officers themselves need support and need to know that what they are trying to do is worth something. Fishery officers attempt to prevent violations.

[*Translation*]

Or observe violations of the Act. If that person, Madam Speaker, in presenting himself to do his job is faced with people who say, "Oh, you're just a fisheries official! I'll give you a punch in the mouth," would the penalty be a \$100 fine? Come on! What support do we give our officials? If our officials enforce the provisions of the Act, and they will do so professionally, I do not think they will take advantage of the situation to hurt people. On the contrary, they will know that when they discharge their responsibilities and do their duty under the Fisheries Act, whoever hinders them will be liable to a fine of up to \$100,000 on summary conviction and \$500,000 if found guilty after being charged. I sincerely believe that these measures will improve the enforcement of the Fisheries Act.

Now, Madam Speaker, there is another aspect of this legislation before us today that I would like to talk about a bit. It concerns the protection of fish habitat.

[*English*]

The bill before the House also entails amending provisions for those who violate the act by committing the offence of altering fish habitat. We know that in some places it has occurred.