

*Government Orders*

Spending on fish will decline appreciably over the next three years. In fact, it will decline by \$211 million in the next budget.

Our party believes that government spending is out of control and that serious cuts should be made. That being said, our party recognizes that there are certain responsibilities the government has, including a constitutional responsibility to manage Canada's fisheries resource in a responsible and reasonable manner.

We should not simply go into the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and willy-nilly cut the budget. We have to do it with great care and caution to ensure that this valuable resource, a resource that could in fact be the engine of the economy on both coasts of our country, is protected.

To begin with, I would like to look at a couple of points in the budget and discuss the impact they will have on the fisheries.

The budget indicates that the government will negotiate with the provinces to transfer authorities for freshwater habitat management and other related inland responsibilities. In other words, the government's objective is to transfer its constitutional responsibility for the inland fisheries resource to the provinces. At the outset, that may seem like a reasonable objective. The fact of the matter is, it denies a very critical problem in the country, that is, the difficulty that is faced by many resource-based communities in our country, communities where the resource extraction may be seasonal, where populations are growing, and where transportation routes are very difficult. That is a problem that we must address as a nation. It is a problem that exists not only in the more remote northern regions of the prairie provinces, but it is also a problem that is becoming more and more evident in the province of Newfoundland, for example.

Last spring, in the standing committee hearings on problems in Newfoundland, the same types of social problems that we have heard about for years, which are occurring and have occurred in the northern communities, in prairie provinces and in the territories, are appearing now in Newfoundland because of the loss of a very valuable fisheries resource.

• (1025)

The federal government, in trying to sidestep its responsibilities in this area, will help no one.

Another issue in the budget states: "to integrate the operations and fleet of the Canadian Coast Guard with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans in order to increase efficiency". We are all for increasing efficiency. The issue that must be determined is if we downsize both fleets and use one smaller fleet to cover both objectives, what will be the priority of that fleet? If the priority is maintaining navigation aids when there is an ongoing fishery, what happens to the enforcement in the fisheries resource? By the same token, if the coast guard vessels are going

to be diverted to the fishery, what happens to the aids to navigation?

We have to look at combining these two operations, but we must make sure that our priorities and responsibilities are maintained. Simply cutting back on the number of vessels and personnel available is not going to do the job.

This government fell down badly on this point in this past salmon season. In the past the coast guard was given the authority on the west coast to enforce fishery law. This did not happen in the 1994 season.

One instance was reported to me where a coast guard vessel was returning from an operational patrol of Vancouver Island. It was called to the Tsawwassen ferry terminal by the B.C. Ferry Corporation because of illegal fishing activity by Americans in Canadian waters. When the coast guard vessel arrived it did not have the authority to arrest those vessels. All it could do was advise them to leave Canadian waters. They tried to contact the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, but no one was available. At that hour of the day the offices were closed and the only contact they had was with a fisheries officer far up river who said: "I'm monitoring a fishery up here, there is nothing I can do".

We must make sure that our priorities are clearly established if we are going to follow the route the government proposes.

There is a proposal to rationalize commercial fishing harbours, including implementing higher fees for use. I have nothing against paying our own way. My party strongly supports that principle. The last thing we want to do is impose fees on people when they are on their knees. That is the case on both coasts. It is an inappropriate time to increase taxes on the fishing industry when it is hardly able to make a living.

Much of the responsibility for that falls not only on this government, of course, but on previous governments.

The government also seeks to enter into partnerships with the fishing industry and others in the management of capacity, licensing and compliance, and it says it looks to industry to pay more for access privileges, contribute toward the cost of managing the fishery and pay higher fees for services. Again, this comes at a time when mismanagement by the federal government has seriously weakened the ability of the fishing industry to pay, not only on the east coast but also on the west coast.

The collapse of the fishery in 1994 was the direct responsibility and directly attributable to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans. It was a devastation, the effect of which will take probably 12 years from which to recover on the west coast for that cycle of fish. Yet we are expecting fishermen to pay higher licensing fees when it will be very difficult for them to maintain payments on their boats, let alone absorb higher licensing fees.