

Oral Questions

Mr. Guilbault (Saint-Jacques): That's the reason for the question.

Mr. Siddon: The facts on this issue as have been stated here, that I learned on the afternoon of Tuesday, December 1, are indeed the facts as stated.

The reference to "immediate action" refers to the Departments of Fisheries and Health in initiating certain actions on the Sunday which had not been brought to my attention, nor which were proved.

In fact, established procedures were followed at all times, as has been carefully underlined in the House by the Hon. Minister of National Health and Welfare. Those procedures have been outlined in a chronology that was released last Thursday, and those are the facts. Standard procedures were followed.

STOP SHIPMENT ORDER—TIME MINISTER WAS INFORMED

Mr. George Henderson (Egmont): There is something wrong with this story, Mr. Speaker, because the Minister is clearly saying, "I and the Minister of Health, Mr. Epp", not his officials—put the stop order on the shipment of mussels on Sunday.

An Hon. Member: No, he did not say that.

Ms. Copps: Yes, he did. Read the interview.

Mr. Henderson: He sent a notice to the producers of Prince Edward Island that all shipments should stop of mussels produced in Prince Edward Island. That is a "stop shipment".

I ask the Minister once again not to blame it on the officials. If he is going to make statements about himself and the Minister of Health, then he must accept the responsibility for making those statements, and he must accept that he is the one who is in charge. If he didn't know with all this evidence, I can tell you one thing, Mr. Speaker, he should have known.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Thomas Siddon (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member is dwelling on an unfortunate confluence of two thoughts expressed in two sentences, and confusing them.

At lunch-time on Tuesday, December 1, scientific information had been analysed by officials in the Departments of Fisheries and Oceans and Health and Welfare.

Ms. Copps: Your assistant knew on the November 27.

Mr. Siddon: That led to information being conveyed by my Deputy Minister to my Chief of Staff, as a result of which I was informed of this situation on the afternoon of December 1. As a result, an alert was issued later that day. That indeed summarizes the facts of the situation.

REQUEST FOR PROGRAM TO COMPENSATE PRODUCERS FOR LOSSES

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, my question is also directed to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans.

The Minister of National Health and Welfare has taken action for health reasons against the consumption and distribution of mussels, oysters, clams, and Gulf of St. Lawrence scallops.

All producers, even those whose product has not been shown to be affected by toxins, are suffering severe economic hardship, and some are facing financial ruin because of this situation.

Will the Minister assure those producers in Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, Quebec, and New Brunswick that he will act quickly to put a compensation program in place to prevent the disastrous financial consequence to these producers?

Hon. Jake Epp (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, in answer to the Hon. Member I just want to make sure the record is very clear. Did the Hon. Member mention scallops? They are not included.

Mr. Harris: Gulf of St. Lawrence scallops.

Mr. Epp (Provencher): They are not included, Mr. Speaker I want to make sure the record is very clear on that.

I wish to say to all Members that advertisements have been placed in major newspapers today, French and English, regarding the plan of action, the manner in which Atlantic clams, mussels, oysters, and quahogs have been removed from the Canadian regional market. A new supply of products will re-enter the marketplace as inspection services are able to ensure that they fully meet health and safety requirements.

I want to say to the Hon. Member, as I said to the House yesterday, it is the health considerations that are of primary concern, and we will handle those first and look at other details later.

• (1500)

EFFECT ON SHELLFISH INDUSTRY

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, the story in *The Globe and Mail* quotes the Minister and indicates that Gulf scallops do not include shrimp, crab, or Atlantic scallops. If he is correcting that, I thank him for it.

However, my question was for the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans. I am referring to comments made by officials in Nova Scotia, the Deputy Minister of Fisheries in Nova Scotia, regarding a very serious financial problem in Nova Scotia. The provincial director of aquaculture in Nova Scotia talked about a major impact and there are the financial effects on the shellfish industry in Prince Edward Island where producers are about to go bankrupt. These are very serious considerations