

Government Organization Act, 1970

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Davis: I should like to deal more particularly with the charge that by creating a department of the environment, by making the fisheries element part of a larger department, we are downgrading the fisheries. The biggest single problem the fisheries have faced over the years, in addition to depletion of stocks through overfishing, has been the effects of pollution, the damage to fish runs in all our major rivers by big industries and chemical processes.

From now on I expect this problem, if not tackled properly, will be problem No. 1. But we intend to tackle it and we can do so more effectively in the context of the department which is concerned with the quality of water and air. Air pollution can effect water, too; note the fact that the oil pollution of the ocean derives far more from the air than it does from spills into the water. We are concerned about water and air pollution and these are also important factors to be taken into account when considering the value of the fishery.

Some pessimism has been expressed about the state of our international negotiations. Canada will be one of the principal nations at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Human Health, in Stockholm in 1972. My understanding is that in 1973 there will be a United Nations-sponsored Law of the Sea conference. We have already developed a policy with respect to that conference, one which we believe we can sell to the majority of nations attending. No fishing for salmon on the high seas; we should be able to put that one over this time around. We did not succeed in the late fifties; perhaps we shall do so in the early seventies. If we do, we shall be able to rebuild Atlantic salmon stocks by establishing hatcheries and spawning grounds on the east coast. We have maintained salmon stock on the west coast. We should be able to more than maintain them on the east coast with that kind of international understanding.

There are meetings in Halifax shortly of the 14 North-west Atlantic nations. The basic theme, as I have mentioned, is conservation, not only the preservation of existing stocks but the rebuilding of stocks to develop a basis for quotas which each country will know it can safely take. I am confident we must show leadership in these fields.

• (9:40 p.m.)

Certainly I am committed to showing leadership, leadership in respect of preservation of resources not only well out in the high seas but particularly over our own continental shelf. It is the biggest continental shelf in the world, in fishing terms, and one of the most productive on the face of the earth. Therefore, it has to be a very important priority both of this new department and of the government.

I think I can say that the record in recent months has been a good one. We have achieved a great deal in terms of price and income to fishermen. We have a great deal more to do with respect to conservation, much of which can only be done in close co-operation with other nations. We are working with them as effectively as we know

[Mr. Davis.]

how and are certainly taking initiatives. The new department has been structured to allow us to do this, and we intend to press on with a number of other matters we have started, with some clear indication of future success.

Mr. Crouse: Mr. Chairman, I should like to ask the minister a question. A moment ago he mentioned his concern about environmental pollution and referred to the action which would be taken under the new measures to control pollution. Would he not agree that the government had the authority to control environmental pollution under the Fisheries Act, which did not allow any deleterious substance to be placed in the water? The problem was that the government was not able to implement the provisions of the act. Is that not correct?

Mr. Davis: Mr. Chairman, I think in a very general way that was true. The Fisheries Act as it stood a year or more ago was not implemented, for the same reason that the Conservative government that preceded the Liberal government did not implement it either.

Mr. Crouse: That is not good enough.

Mr. Davis: This legislation, which was drawn over 100 years ago, provided that nothing shall be dumped into our waters, but it proved impossible effectively to prosecute offenders under that act. We amended the act last year so that we could prosecute offenders effectively. So the answer is that we had to improve the act to make it work, and that is what we did.

Mr. McGrath: Mr. Chairman, may I ask a question of the minister? Does he propose to bring to the ICNAF meeting in Halifax the Canadian proposal to ban salmon fishing on the high seas, or is this merely to be the subject of bilateral talks with the Danes?

Mr. Davis: We will bring it up again, Mr. Chairman. As the hon. member may recall, last year we raised it quite specifically at the ICNAF meeting but were unable to get unanimous agreement. We are raising it again, of course, and we will be raising it bilaterally with Denmark and with West Germany, which are the two real holdouts in this area. There are not many nations in that category which at a world conference would be against the proposal, and that is why I am optimistic about 1973 and getting United Nations support to ban salmon fishing on the high seas.

Mr. Bell: Mr. Chairman, I know the minister has had meetings with and is getting some co-operation from the commercial salmon fishermen in regard to the new salmon regulations. Will the minister say whether the new regulations will be on a year to year basis and that the regulations this year will not automatically continue into next year? In other words, will the minister take a new look at them on an annual basis?

Mr. Davis: Mr. Chairman, I hope that in matters of this kind I will always have an open mind. I am sure that the department is not bound from year to year in regard to the regulations. We have put forward regulations which we think are workable. We will modify them as occasion