

Humane Animal Traps

Mr. W. Kenneth Robinson (Toronto-Lakeshore): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member for Esquimalt-Saanich (Mr. Munro) for bringing forward Bill C-208 for discussion. I subscribe to its purposes. The explanatory note reads:

The purpose of this amendment is to prohibit the use of leg-hold snares and other inhumane types of trap where a practical alternative is now available or becomes available in the future, to promote the eventual phasing-out of such traps, and to encourage the correct setting of traps meant to cause instantaneous death.

I should like to take this opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to voice my support for my colleague's efforts to prohibit the use of leg-hold traps and other cruel trapping methods. It is sometimes necessary to provide a stimulus for change and this is one of those times. The hon. member for Esquimalt-Saanich should be congratulated for providing us with a reasonable bill that should commend itself to the House.

The bill before us now has two key aspects. The first is to eliminate a method of trapping which can only be described as inhumane, namely, the leg-hold snare. The second and by no means less important feature is the provision made for practicality. The proposed amendment is not a wild-eyed reform; rather, it is a considered solution to a serious problem. The hon. member calls for the prohibition of certain traditional methods of trapping only where practical alternatives are now available. This approach is laudable because the hon. member has made the necessary distinction between traps specifically and trapping generally. The proposed amendment would not destroy the livelihood of trappers. It does not prohibit trapping, just the use of those traps which cause the animal prolonged suffering. Because of this the enforcement of this amendment would be both reasonable and practicable.

As hon. members know, a number of Canadians—and here I refer to our native people as well as white trappers—depend on the hunt or the fur trade for their livelihood and in some cases for their existence. An industry as long established as fur trapping should not be lightly disturbed. The seal hunters of Newfoundland are all too familiar with this phenomenon. No, Mr. Speaker, this bill provides, instead, for the needs of the people most directly involved in any alteration in the terms of the fur trade. It will not deprive the trapper of the essential tools of his trade at the stroke of a far-off pen.

The burden of change does not lie merely on our consciences and our attitudes, sitting as we are in the relative comfort of an urban environment. It lies on those who must bear the cost. For example, a fur trapper with an income of about \$7,000 a year finds it necessary to invest some of that income in the purchase and maintenance of his equipment. A leg-hold trap runs in price from \$2 to \$5. Multiply this by 30 or 40 and the cost, if the average price per trap is \$3.50, is about \$105. Moreover, the weight of the leg-hold trap is one and a half pounds; multiply this by 30, and the trapper must transport 45 pounds of traps to his trapline.

One alternative to the leg-hold trap is the Conibear trap. It has been argued that this trap is a reasonable replacement. However, there are two basic points that must be looked at. First, this type of trap will cost from \$14 to \$25; 30 traps at

[Mr. Firth.]

\$25 each will cost the trapper \$750. You will recognize that this is a considerable expenditure indeed. Furthermore, this trap weighs four pounds ten ounces. The total weight of 30 traps would in this case be 123 pounds. I would not like to be the person, Mr. Speaker, who had to carry 30 or 40 Conibear traps through woods in winter. We wish to show, therefore, that we are not simply enacting a reform in a small economic sector whose importance is relatively small. We are trying, through this bill, to take into consideration the needs and the interests of the people directly and indirectly involved.

I have already mentioned the Conibear trap as an alternative currently available to the leg-hold trap. I have pointed out that its weight and cost disqualify it as a reasonable and logical choice to replace the leg-hold variety. There are, however, other types of traps which have to be considered.

The federal-provincial committee on humane trapping has advertised for and has received a number of designs. In fact over 100 proposed patented models have been submitted to the committee for their consideration. Testing and evaluating are a painstaking process and, as a result, the committee will not present its final recommendations for another three years. However, there are also four types of traps that have been mechanically tested for the committee by the Canadian Standards Association. These traps are the Bigelow, the Hanson, the Dahlgner and the Instant Killer traps. Each of these traps has its commendable points, not the least of which is that each is a non-leg snare; but each is also exceedingly heavy. The Bigelow, for example, weighs two and a half pounds. The Instant Killer weighs about six pounds. Multiply that by 30 again and you will come up with another impossibly heavy load. This may seem like an excessively gloomy presentation of the actual situation in the trapping industry. Nevertheless, the existence of several varieties of substitutes shows that the problem has been solved in principle.

The requirements for an alternative trapping method are known; they are cost, weight, force, and holding technique. Refinements are necessary but the basic technology exists. While current models are not practical replacements for the leg-hold trap it has been shown that substitutes do exist in theory. What is required is a concentrated effort to refine the present possibilities, to remove those features that make the traps mentioned and others, unrealistic. By putting the force of law behind this proposal the impetus will exist to effect these changes.

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As Canadians we pride ourselves on being civilized and humane. We also take pride in our equitable nature. The passage of this bill will allow us to continue to extol these virtues. However, if the leg-hold trap is allowed to remain, our sincerity and integrity will be subject to question. By passing this bill, Mr. Speaker, our concern will have the force of action to its credit and it will not simply be dismissed as a series of platitudes.

At present the efforts being made by the federal-provincial committee are most commendable. By carefully considering