

Supply

this minister is focusing on the wrong thing, he should be focusing on the foreign overfishing as well as listening to fishermen rather than to his scientists.

Mr. MacKay: Madam Speaker, Premier Buchanan, naturally is concerned, as my colleague is, about the fishery in Nova Scotia. He too is reacting to some extent out of frustration, I believe. No one cares more about the fishing industry or the people of Nova Scotia than John Buchanan, but at the same time, the provinces as my colleague knows, control the issuing of licences. I think it is fair to say that the province of Nova Scotia perhaps was a little too generous and may itself have contributed to this problem by issuing licences without sufficient study as to whether the capacity to sustain those licences was there.

I think it is true that many of us, including myself and herself and the minister, at times are not perceived to listen closely enough to the fishermen. I have great respect for them. I can relate to Premier Buchanan's comments in that regard.

I think the fishermen have a better track record by far in producing logical data and observations than some of our highly paid and esoteric marine biologists and oceanographers who are so technically oriented that they sometimes lose track of some of the practical and empirical observations that people in the industry make every day.

• (1600)

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): Resuming debate with the hon. member for St. John's East.

Mr. Ross Reid (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Madam Speaker, the debate that we are participating in today should be one of the most important debates that I hope this chamber deals with in the next period of time. Today, I was supposed to speak to a large number of people in St. John's on exactly this topic. As has been obviously the case with members on all sides of the House, this is the place where I have to be to discuss what is clearly one of the most important issues that faces all Canadians, not just Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, not just Nova Scotians, not just Atlantic Canadians, but all Canadians. That is the challenge that we face in our fishery.

A number have said over a period of time, and this motion infers it as well, that this government does not

care about the Atlantic fishery. More to the point, it has been said by my friends opposite that the government does not acknowledge that there is a problem in the fishery. The first thing that my colleague, the Minister of Fisheries, said this morning was exactly that we face a serious challenge in dealing with the potential problems that our fishery and all of those who participate in it and depend on it face.

It is not just a challenge of fish. It is not just a challenge of the number of plants, the number of jobs, and the number of trawlers. More than anything, it is a challenge that deals with people. It is a challenge of communities, of families. It is a challenge that is about the very essence, particularly of Newfoundland and Labrador. It is about our culture, our history, and our lifeblood. Perhaps more than anything, it is about our future. It is the concern for that future that has motivated this government.

First, we recognize that the challenge we face in the fishery is not just a fish problem in Atlantic Canada, but a national problem of economics and a national problem to deal with Canadian people. It is that motivation that has made this government move ahead on a number of fronts to address the problem in a realistic and serious manner, not just to woe the situation or to bleat about what is wrong, but to try and come to terms with what we face as we deal with the quota question, for instance.

What is going to be the impact in the fishery if we have to reduce the quota from where it was in 1977 on, or from what we hoped and thought it should be? Quite clearly, we are going to have to reduce that quota. But the government must say to itself, and we all must say to ourselves, what does that mean for the fishery? First, what are the impacts on the fishery? Once we know what it means within the fishery, what is it going to mean to the economy around and depending upon the fishery? Again, and perhaps most important, what, therefore, does that matter to the people? What does it matter to the families in the communities that depend on that fishery and that economy?

There is a growing recognition that these things come together, that they are interlinked, that they are involved, that one depends on the other, that one flows from the other. Therefore, there must be a comprehensive approach to the problem. There must be a comprehensive approach to knowing what may happen, what