

We constantly talk in this House about ways of creating more jobs. In seeking this objective we most often go the traditional route by establishing industries, industries which are bound to phase workers out through improved technology, and decrease the cost of the product. A better answer, surely, would be to raise the value of our renewable resources and put more people to work in the renewable resources sector. In my opinion the government deserves credit for what it has done by way of this bill.

I am sure every member of the committee has been approached by various companies and groups with regard to the bill—I am thinking particularly of the mining and forestry industry. Knowing the members of the committee, I think I can say all of them have studied with care the briefs presented to them. They raise rather serious examples to show that should the bill be implemented with a heavy hand there is likely to be somewhat serious industrial dislocation. I have to say to both the mining and the forest industries in British Columbia that if they had shown a little more concern about the value of the fish in the province they might not have been faced with this bill today. I believe that industry and fish can live together. There is no need for them to be in conflict. But at the moment conflict is the rule rather than the exception; the mining industry, in particular, has ignored the value of the fishing resource time and time again.

The best example is probably that placed before the committee by the B.C. Wildlife Federation. They dealt with a river which runs very close to my riding, actually the old riding of Fraser Valley West—the Coquitlam River. Twenty years ago this river produced between 4,000 and 5,000 pink salmon, the same number of Chum salmon, between 1,500 and 2,000 Coho salmon, and the same number of steelhead trout.

In its wisdom the municipality decided to allow gravel mining operations right in the bed of the river. Subsequently such operations were carried out on the banks of the river but the silt-laden water that went into the stream destroyed the fish habitat. The difficulty was that this did not necessarily constitute a violation of the Fisheries Act because it could not satisfactorily be proven that the spawn itself was being destroyed. In fact what was being destroyed was the habitat, so the fish were not spawned at all. If this fishery had been maintained instead of the gravel industry, the economic value of the Coquitlam River fishing resource would today be \$4 million a year. That is a measure of the destruction which has gone on in the past. Therefore I say to the mining industry, to the forest industry and to other industries which are concerned about these provisions that if they would co-operate with the people of British Columbia and with the Department of Fisheries I firmly believe the bill we are considering does not need to be destructive and that it can do the job of bringing back this precious resource.

In the Fraser River, the anadromous fish stock has declined by some 50 per cent in the last 30 years. We can bring this resource back and we can stop what has been a massive and concerted attack on the fish habitat.

Fisheries Act

I must say I had some initial reservations about the strict liability provisions of the bill, but thinking back to some of the legal principles of Rylands and Fletcher, since industry decides to place deleterious substances into the environment, since it decides to move those substances, I frankly do not see it is immoral that strict liability should attach to those who move those substances. After all, who is placing those substances into the environment to damage the resource? Therefore the screams which come from industry on this matter have fallen on deaf ears in this House, as I think they should. In my opinion we have to quit playing around nervously and put the onus where it belongs. The onus is on those who bring deleterious substances into the environment.

Of course, I am disappointed that the House did not see fit to accept the amendment which would have given the minister discretion to shut down those rivers which are mercury-polluted as a result of which the health of Canadians could be affected. I think it is inconsistent for us to be talking about giving the minister very substantial additional powers and yet he refuses to accept a key power by which he would have the authority not merely to protect the health of fish but also, perhaps, to protect the health of humans at the same time.

As I say, I am in general agreement with the remarks previously made by the hon. member for Perth-Wilmot. I think the government is entitled to be congratulated on having brought this bill forward. Again, though, I would draw attention to the fact that it carries all-party support. I am satisfied that it is a necessary pre-condition to the renewal of recreational and commercial fishing in British Columbia.

Mr. Bob Brisco (Kootenay West): Mr. Speaker, in speaking to the bill before us, in the consideration of which I have participated throughout second reading, committee stage, and now at report stage and third reading, I would say there are some concerns which have persisted. One of them was recently recalled to my mind when the hon. member for New Westminster (Mr. Leggatt) brought forward his amendment.

Turning to the minister's statement made in the Committee on Fisheries and Forestry, I would like to refer to page four of his address to that committee on June 16. The minister at that time referred to the impact of pollution on our rivers and said: "How many English Wabagoons can those who rely on Canada's fisheries stand?" He then went on to say, as can be found on page five of his statement:

The Fisheries Act exists for the people of Canada to protect their common property fish resource. The Fisheries Act is important to the fishermen of Canada, many of whom do not have alternate employment opportunities and many of them of native origin.

• (2150)

In light of those statements alone contained in the minister's speech to the committee, I am surprised at the actions of the government in voting against the amendment proposed by the hon. member for New Westminster today.

I should like to deal with another concern which is raised at page 4 of the minister's speech of the same date, and which reads as follows: