

Motion for Papers

Perhaps I should review the situation at Long Harbour. I should begin with the brand new \$40 million facility at Long Harbour which started up 12 months ago. It started up and was shut down intermittently as teething problems in the plant were encountered and overcome. There was an early fish kill, then there was no kill; then, there was a second and eventually a third kill. Immediately after the first kill our own Fisheries Research Board people went to the site and from early January stayed on continuously. Within a few days we had a large number of fishery scientists, biologists and engineers on site. They were baffled for some time because they did not know the precise nature of the pollution, and for reasons which will become obvious they were not able to pin down say for certain that the source of the pollution, was in the plant.

The position in which the department was at that time, and still is today, is that unless you have not only evidence of fish killed but can definitely prove the cause of the fish kill, you cannot prosecute. This is the position under the Fisheries Act at the present time. This is one of the reasons why we want to up-date, amend and improve the Fisheries Act, that is, we want to put teeth in it.

Our scientists were also in the difficult position of finding that fish in cages at the very outfall of the plant did not die, so that they were unable to prove definitely within the first few weeks that the plant was the source of pollution. This was eventually established and the plant, which never ran for more than a couple of days at a time, was shut down as a result of an understanding with the Department of Fisheries and Forestry.

It did not start up again until all the effluent was contained on the plant property, was treated in ponds on the plant property, and any water and other waste material likely to contain elemental phosphorus was recirculated within the plant and recovered within the property of the company itself. It was found that elemental phosphorus was the cause of the pollution; also that it was far more toxic than it was ever thought to be. No reference in the scientific literature which could have been turned up at the time indicated the degree to which this particular substance, colloidal phosphorus, was poisonous to fish and other forms of marine life.

We have a situation today where the effluent is totally recycled within the plant. There is no elemental phosphorus escaping from the plant, nor can it possibly escape. The bottom

of the harbour has been dredged out to remove any of the phosphorus material which was deposited there. This is the situation with regard to the plant.

I believe the government moved expeditiously. We called a halt to fishing in the area. We made provision for compensation for the fishermen. Not only did we buy all the fish that could possibly have been contaminated by phosphorus over a very wide area—not just Long Harbour but the whole of Placentia Bay—so that the fish would not get on the market and affect the reputation of fish from Newfoundland or from eastern Canada, but also our officers went to every fisherman whose means of livelihood had been cut off and arranged for payments to him to be made on the basis of his previous year's income. So the taxpayer of Canada, in effect, helped to carry each fisherman over the difficult period until fishing could be resumed. Fishing was interrupted for roughly two months and resumed again in July.

There was some scepticism as to whether the fish would be all right, but later it was proved that there was no problem. Again, the fish were held off the market to ensure that there was no threat to human health or to the livelihood of the fishermen.

Subsequently, settlements have been reached between the Electric Reduction Company and the fishermen. On the basis of earlier assessments by the Department of Fisheries and Forestry, the company offered to pay individual fishermen twice as much as had been loaned to the fishermen by the government. Close to half the fishermen accepted that payment and, I understand, signed a paper which in effect said that this put an end to their claims. Whether or not this is a good thing, it happened. However, a larger number of fishermen decided to band together. They retained counsel and launched a law suit against the company. In their case, a settlement has been arrived at which is of the order of two and a half times the loan which the federal government made to carry the fishermen over the two months interval in which they were forbidden to fish in Placentia Bay.

So, the fishermen have been in receipt of moneys for the fish which they caught and in relation to saleability, about which we were concerned, they received a loan from the taxpayers of Canada to bide them over the two months period when they were not allowed to fish. Then, they received a subsequent settlement from the company. It has been a very