

*Supply—Fisheries*

But if that is all that is holding it up, I hope that next year I shall not have to make this speech which I have made for the last five years on the Sakinaw dam.

**Mr. McWilliam:** Under this item, Mr. Chairman, I wish to bring to the minister's attention the vital need for adequate protection of the smelt fishing industry of the Miramichi. To show the importance of this industry to the people of the eastern part of the constituency of Northumberland, which I represent, I wish to read into the record some statistics from the annual report of the department of industry and development of the province of New Brunswick. The smelt fishing industry of New Brunswick produced in the 1950 season 3,857,300 pounds of smelts. This amount was a decrease of 251,600 pounds as compared with the 1949 catch. While the quantity of smelts caught in 1950 showed a decrease, the landed value nevertheless showed an increase of \$88,294. This decrease in quantity meant a loss of \$35,224 to the fishermen.

The Miramichi bay and river produce the vast majority of the smelts caught in New Brunswick, and the drop of 251,600 pounds can be directly attributed to the heavy losses of nets and gear suffered by the Miramichi fishermen in December, 1949, and January, 1950. These losses, caused by unseasonable thunderstorms and a run-off of ice, were estimated to be \$100,000. I can assure hon. members that this is a big item for the fishermen. In many individual cases fishermen lost their entire outlay on nets and gear, which had dire effects. Many of them were unable to re-establish themselves, so could not continue fishing for the remainder of the season. In some cases fishermen have been forced to give up smelt fishing entirely. Government assistance was requested from both the provincial and dominion governments. However, the governments held the view that the losses were a normal risk of the trade, and as requests had been received from numerous other localities in the maritimes and British Columbia for compensation for similar losses, it was felt that a precedent could not be established because it would have to apply to all parts of Canada.

Protection is vitally needed for the smelt fishing industry of the Miramichi. Another loss such as that suffered in the 1949-50 season could mean the finish of the smelt fishing industry in that area. The cause of the run-off of ice during the winter months, which carries the nets out to sea, is stated to be due to the washing away of the shores of Portage island in Miramichi bay. This widens the channel at that point, with the result that the former natural barrier no

longer exists, and in the mild weather the tides carry the ice, and the nets, through the enlarged opening into the gulf of St. Lawrence. In many cases not only the gear and nets were lost, but the fishing shanties and in two or three cases the horses were also taken out to sea. On many occasions requests have been made that artificial barriers be erected to stop the heavy run-off of ice, thereby preventing the heavy losses in nets and gear which are being suffered each year by the smelt fishermen of the Miramichi. I again appeal to the minister and, through the minister, to the cabinet, that immediate action be taken to provide that protection which is so vitally needed.

As to a survey of the situation, my information to date is that the Department of Public Works made an interim report on the matter and estimated that the cost for the works required would run in the vicinity of one million dollars. Before further consideration could be given to the actual construction, the Department of Fisheries felt that, as the matter is so important, a complete survey should be made of the fisheries of the Miramichi. I understand that this survey is now being completed.

I realize that the minister and his department are fully cognizant of the difficulties experienced by the smelt fishermen of the Miramichi; and while it has been suggested in some quarters that it is doubtful that even the works proposed will accomplish the desired objective, I strongly urge—and I make a strong plea on behalf of the Miramichi smelt fishermen—that the minister take immediate steps, in conjunction with the Department of Public Works, in the matter of providing adequate protection for the Miramichi smelt fishing industry, which is the chief means of livelihood for many good Canadians residing in east Northumberland.

Is the minister in a position to make any statement at this time?

**Mr. Mayhew:** The department is extremely sympathetic to this project. When it was referred to the Department of Public Works, the estimate for doing the job was fairly high, we thought, and we ordered a re-investigation. In fact, at the end of the hon. member's own statement he set out the position of the Department of Fisheries. That investigation will go on until we get some final answer with respect to the matter.

**Mr. Higgins:** May I ask the minister if the Minister of Finance is responsible for the reduction of the amount of this item as well?

**Mr. Abbott:** He has the wholehearted co-operation of all departments.