

The minister was informed by the advisory committee on July 11 that a supplement for boats over 100 feet could be challenged by certain provinces and, of course, coastal fishermen. Here, Mr. Speaker, is an excerpt from the minutes of that committee, and I quote:

Cod stocks in area 4T seem in better shape. Members are generally in favour of an increase in the current TAC (total authorized catch); however, the possibility of a TAC increase and allocations to boats over and under 100 feet bring out contradictory opinions—

A few days later, the minister received a working paper entitled "The Minister's Briefing Notes," in which the civil servants bring up the same problems. I quote:

[English]

If the quota is increased by this amount in 1979, the inshore fleet segment will be happy. However, knowing that the scientific advice suggests we can increase by as much as 13,000, the offshore segment will be most vocal in their objections. Conversely, allowing the large vessels to catch up to this amount of fish in 4T (an area currently excluded to vessels greater than 100 feet) would be totally unacceptable to the inshore fishermen, . . . and such a policy would be violently opposed by the provinces of Quebec, New Brunswick, and P.E.I.

● (2225)

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, the inshore fishermen are against increased quotas for vessels greater than 100 feet, and rightly so. For them, and those who work in the processing plants, their families, the towns where they live, access to those resources is indispensable.

In his press release of August 27 advising the fishermen of higher quotas, the minister took them by surprise, and especially the governments of Quebec, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, by authorizing vessels of more than 100 feet, which belong to big companies, to catch 6,000 additional tons in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and that, to the detriment of inshore fishermen.

Mr. Speaker, a few days after making his decision on August 27, the minister stated at a conference on northern cod, and I quote:

Our policy, my policy on this matter is simple and well-defined. Coastal fishermen have priority access to this resource.

You will certainly agree, Mr. Speaker, that this minister wears many hats.

Like several other members, Mr. Speaker, I am wondering whether the hon. minister has one policy for the coastal fishermen of Newfoundland, another for those of New Brunswick, another for those of Quebec, and finally another favouring large companies. Indeed, why did he authorize vessels greater than 100 feet to catch 6,000 metric tons of cod in the Gulf when no, I repeat, no favourable recommendation to this effect was made by the Atlantic Groundfish Advisory Committee or in the working paper that he received from his officials?

Adjournment Debate

Mr. Speaker, the government has often boasted that it could come to an agreement with the provinces on any subject. I can therefore not understand how the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans can decide to let trawlers of 100 feet or more into the Gulf of St. Lawrence knowing that the provinces of Quebec, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, as well as the coastal fishermen of the Gulf, including those of Newfoundland, have expressed disagreement about his new policy. Mr. Speaker, the minister has unilaterally made a decision which is unacceptable to eastern Canada.

Since this new policy will have unfavourable effects on the fishing industry of Quebec, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland, as well as Cape Breton Island, I ask on behalf of my colleagues from eastern Quebec and eastern Canada that the hon. minister postpone his decision until the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Forestry has studied the matter.

Mr. Thomas Siddon (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank the hon. member for Gaspé for outlining these problems.

[English]

I am pleased to comment on the issue raised by the hon. member for Gaspé (Mr. Cyr) and, in so doing, to establish the facts and events as they happened. The management of all the Atlantic groundfish fishery is based on recommendations made by the Atlantic Groundfish Advisory Committee. The provinces, the industry, and the fishermen's associations are all represented on that committee.

At the July 11, 1979, meeting of AGAC, the possibility of increasing the 1979 total allowable catch for the southern Gulf was discussed. Scientific advice indicated that there was room to increase the total allowable catch by some 13,000 tons over the 36,000 already allocated for that fishery. Following that meeting, further consultation with representatives of vessels under 100 feet indicated that they required 4,000 tons to carry their fishery to the end of the fishing season. This means in effect that 9,000 tons were left to be allocated, and representatives of vessels over 100 feet were quite anxious to have all that quota. However, in order not to affect the 1980 total allowable catch and to be on the safe side, the Minister of Fisheries decided to authorize the allocation of only 6,000 tons to the larger vessels. These vessels will not commence fishing until after November 1.

I think it would have been irresponsible for the minister not to allocate at least part of the recommended increase, when the scientific advice suggested this could be done in accordance with sound conservation principles. The hon. member would probably have criticized the minister if he decided not to allocate that quota. In allocating Gulf stocks, the minister has made it clear that the priority should go to the small inshore fleet. However, one must not confuse priority and exclusivity.