

Government Organization Act, 1970

hope that in the interests of maintaining the traditional name of the department and its association with the fishing industry the amendment will meet with the acceptance of this chamber.

Mr. Lundrigan: Mr. Chairman, this is a simple amendment and I am sure it will meet with no opposition from the minister of fisheries or his friends on the government benches. After all, it does little more than give due recognition to an industry which is of great importance to eastern Quebec, four Atlantic provinces and British Columbia. A little more than a week ago, my hon. friend from the south shore of Nova Scotia moved an amendment which would have meant the appointment of a full-fledged deputy minister of fisheries. He, of course, would be the chief executive responsible for fisheries matters in Canada. At the moment, we have a minister of fisheries in the House of Commons and we shall continue to do so until this measure meets with parliamentary approval.

In the two years and eight months during which I have been a member of this House I have raised fisheries issues with the department on many occasions. I suppose there is hardly a member sitting here who has not expressed concern about the decline in stocks of fish off our coast as a result of exploitation by the Soviet Union, by the Scandinavian countries, the Iberian countries and, in fact, by all western European countries. Some of the North African countries are now planning to harvest fish along our continental shelf.

● (4:50 p.m.)

We have been pressuring the minister of fisheries to make an attempt to convene an international conference that will give our fishing industry some special direction and impetus to enable it to take its rightful place in the Canadian economy. This would provide our fishermen with a proper return for their labour, and also enable the fishing industry and our marine resources to make a proper contribution to the general welfare of the Canadian nation.

The passage of the bill now before the committee, which seeks to create a department of the environment and to subjugate the fisheries department to a minor role within the proposed department of the environment, we feel would seriously downgrade the role of the fishery in Canada. My colleague from St. John's East has put forward a very simple and sincere recommendation, namely that we give the fisheries department at least some semblance of its original status by renaming this proposed department the "department of fisheries and the environment". I cannot see any objection to the amendment and I am sure the minister of fisheries will accept it with the respect it deserves.

I imagine that in the very near future the minister of fisheries will have to sit down with the representatives of a number of European and Scandinavian countries, as well as the Soviet Union, and engage in a debate on the fishing industry and marine resources. I think he would have less status speaking as a minister of the environ-

[Mr. Crouse.]

ment responsible, on the one hand, for the effluent of the pulp and paper plant across the river here, as well as, on the other hand, for the fishing stocks in Groswater Bay or off the coast of Vancouver Island. He would have more status speaking as minister of fisheries and the environment, and this is the main reason I support the amendment.

It has been said that the fishing industry of Canada has never occupied the status position that it should have in the Canadian economy. I suppose there are a number of reasons for this. Successive governments, in my opinion, have not treated the fishery as an industry which could contribute to Canada's economic development. As an industry it has never been fully recognized, even though it was originally the staple industry in the Canadian economy.

For example, I can go back to the 15th century, when the original settlers from Europe came to what is now Canada in 1497 and exploited the fishery. I am sure the minister has become familiar with all the stories that have been told about this since he became minister. For example, he probably knows how they used these great baskets—unsubsidized baskets, by the way—put rocks in them, threw them overboard and then dragged them up full to overflowing with fish. In fact, fish were so plentiful that they rolled ashore on the beaches.

Cod are far from plentiful at the moment, though occasionally we do get hake on the shore. However, during the last 20 years or so there has been a tremendous decline in the fishing resources of the Atlantic. The minister is in his seat, and I presume he is listening to the debate, so must be aware that what I am saying is a fact. On Georges Bank the fishery is all but eliminated. On the Hamilton Inlet banks the Russians were responsible in 1968 for taking a quarter of a billion pounds of fish. I think that is the correct statistic, but certainly over a billion pounds of fish have been taken from the Hamilton Inlet banks. These are the spawning grounds of the Labrador fishery, which at one time was a major industry.

There was a time when thousands of men would sail down the coast of Labrador and set up residences somewhere for a few weeks or months in the summer to reap a great harvest of cod that was swimming along the shores and which populated the bays and inlets of Labrador. But during the last few years not only Russia and other countries, but Canada as well, have declared war on the fishing grounds on the Hamilton Inlet banks 250 miles east of the Labrador shore. As a result, we have seen the almost complete destruction—no, I submit the complete destruction—of the Labrador fishery, thus affecting the livelihoods of thousands of Canadians.

Let me put on the record once again the amount of fish that has been taken off the Hamilton Inlet banks off the Labrador coast. These fish would be sufficient to keep the largest plant in my riding going full blast at its present capacity and employment rate for 100 years. This particular plant, which is situated at Twillingate, Newfoundland, employs something of the order of 350 people during the peak period.