

Private Members' Business

Mr. Ross Belsher (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I am very glad to rise this afternoon in this House and speak to the motion that we have before us that says:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should take action against the unfavourable GATT ruling in relation to British Columbia salmon and herring.

• (1740)

Mr. Speaker, I wish to speak against this motion that we have before us—

Mr. Whittaker: Support us on this one. Support the fisheries in B.C.

Mr. Belsher: Well, I'm all for the fisheries in B.C. That's just it. I am perfectly satisfied that the action we are taking is more in the way of protecting the fisheries and runs less risk than to take advice from the other side of the House and go against the GATT ruling that we have before us.

Just because the GATT ruling is unfavourable in relation to British Columbia salmon and herring, I am confident that the facts relating to the British Columbia salmon and herring fisheries makes it very clear that this government has brought this issue to a satisfactory resolution.

As the last speaker said, I guess a year ago this motion would have been very much in order because there had not been a satisfactory resolution to the GATT ruling, but a ruling has been made. The predictions which we have heard from time to time about the demise of the industry simply do not add up to scrutiny, Mr. Speaker.

Time and time again in this House we have heard the doom and gloom that has been portrayed from the members opposite. Time and time again, Mr. Speaker, they have been false. It is a sad commentary on how this House works when the members opposite do things that really set out to scare people and to lead them into thinking that black is not black and white is not white, things like that.

Members of this House will be aware of the importance of these fisheries for the Canadian economy. British Columbia salmon and roe herring are valued at close to \$1 billion in annual wholesale value. Over 4,400 salmon fishing vessels and 1,500 herring fishing vessels involving 15,000 fishermen participate in these fisheries along the 6,000 miles of B.C. coastline. On average,

80,000 tonnes of salmon and 30,000 tonnes of roe herring are landed each year. The processing sector employs approximately 6,000 persons. Approximately 200 vessels are currently licensed as fish packers.

In coming to a resolution of the dispute brought by the United States before the GATT, to which this motion refers, the government has consistently sought to ensure that the conservation and management regime applied to these vital natural resources is maintained. This would enable the economic benefits which they bring to the communities along the coastline of British Columbia to be sustained and enhanced.

When the United States objected to the landing requirement introduced in April 1989 for all salmon and herring, it was agreed to take this matter to a panel established under the free trade agreement as a means of finding a satisfactory resolution of this matter.

The decision of that panel confirmed Canada's right to verify catch reporting and to conduct biological sampling to provide for the conservation and management of the salmon and roe herring fishery resource. However, it was the panel's view that a percentage of the resource could be exported directly from the fishing grounds without impairing the integrity of the fishery management regime. On the basis of this decision, agreement was reached on February 22 of this year with the United States.

The member opposite has alluded to that and it was 20 per cent for year one and it could roll by a further 1 per cent each year until it reached 25 per cent, if my memory serves me correctly.

Mr. Stupich: Then you decide what's going to happen anyway.

Mr. Belsher: The member opposite wants to cross bridges before we get to them. I think we should deal with the issue as we now have it before us.

This agreement permitted specified percentages of the total allowable catch of British Columbia salmon and roe herring to be made available to the U.S. buyers for direct sea exports in each of three British Columbia export zones, the south, the central, and the north.

In implementing this negotiated resolution, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans established an export management unit. This unit verifies catch reporting and