

Atlantic Fisheries Restructuring Act

Minister other than the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and other than the Minister responsible for the Canada Development Investment Corporation, as they have been outlined to me by Mr. Ron Bulmer, the spokesman for the Fisheries Council of Canada, which represents not only the processors but also some inshore and offshore fishermen as well. Mr. Bulmer makes the following point:

1. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans now regulates allocations, plant licences, in-plant inspection, and is planning to police grading. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans should not have the pressure toward or the appearance of bias by being responsible for restructuring, and ongoing funding of restructured companies.

2. Key elements of Bill C-170 are financial in nature and are needed for the development of Atlantic Canada. Therefore, the Bill should reside in an economic department where financial analytical and business skills reside.

3. The U.S.A. market would perceive such a management function and stated reprivatization as positive signs, thus minimizing the risk of countervail.

I would interject here and say that the risk of countervail, in light of the programs in motion in the United States, is a very real concern at this time among the 700 independents still surviving in the fishing industry in Atlantic Canada and Quebec. He continues:

4. Processors will continue to feel that only those who toe the party line and perhaps accept other government initiatives such as in the marketing area will ever qualify for any of the funds outlined in Bill C-170 while this Bill resides under the powers of the Ministry of Fisheries and Oceans.

Mr. Speaker, our amendments and our speeches have indicated that we share these concerns. We believe that two elements in this Bill that need to be further pursued are moving the powers of the Bill to an economic Ministry and gaining some form of mechanism for establishing the review process. We need a guarantee that the taxpayers' dollars are being well managed and that Parliament and the industry can determine exactly how many of these dollars are involved. Further, there is an obvious need for a direct balance of power between ongoing practices in the fishery and the restructuring process.

Since the conclusion of the committee meetings to which I referred last week, my office as well as the offices of other Members of the Official Opposition have been contacted repeatedly by witnesses who appeared in Ottawa. After thanking us for the efforts we made on their behalf, these witnesses have again expressed their concern that a mechanism for improved consultation with the fishing industry and with provincial Government must be established. Our Party moved an amendment to this effect in committee, but unfortunately it was voted down by the Liberal majority.

Mr. Tobin: And the NDP.

Mr. Crouse: The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister says, "And the NDP". He is quite correct and I thank him for that addition. The point at issue here is that while we were trying to amend and improve the Bill, some of the Liberal Members, who indicated in one way or another that they do not like this Bill either, did not take the opportunity to stand up and be counted. They voted with the Government and killed this very worth-while amendment. I regret that action. We moved this amendment and it was voted down.

I am now going to urge the Government to establish a restructuring review council.

Mr. Breau: Which one did I vote down?

Mr. Crouse: The Hon. Member for Gloucester (Mr. Breau) asks which one he voted down. I will remind him that he voted this down in committee. I am going to urge that the Government establish a restructuring review council that will consist of representatives from all relevant sectors of the industry as well as provincial Governments. The work of this review council would be to focus its attention on the extent to which restructuring is achieving its stated purpose. That is our major concern at this stage. They should present an annual report to Parliament containing their recommendations. That is what we would like to see. It may well be, after consideration, that the stone which the builders rejected in committee could well become the cornerstone of the restructuring process for the information of Parliament.

These views have been echoed and re-echoed through the brief as presented in committee. They are in the brief that was presented to the committee by the Department of Fisheries of the Province of New Brunswick. I am just going to place this on the record. It reads:

Generally, the New Brunswick fishing industry has weathered the economic recession of the past few years in relatively good shape. Our independent processors, both large and small, and our fishermen, independent owner-operators of their own vessels, have been able to survive economic hardship through their own good efforts, and the support offered to them by the New Brunswick Department of Fisheries and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. A loans program for vessel acquisition and improvement, training programs, technical advice, innovative fisheries and the exploitation of new species—all have assisted the New Brunswick fishery to adapt and survive.

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The reports that came from the New Brunswick representatives indicated at least a healthy fishery if not an extremely profitable one. It was gratifying for me to listen to their presentation because it indicated that private enterprise and the force it engenders is still in a healthy state in your own native Province, Mr. Speaker.

The Eastern Fisheries Federation made a number of outstanding points in the presentation that it made before the committee. I wish time permitted me to earmark all of them, but I will refer briefly to one or two. They stated that there was a lack of consultation. They went on to say:

Independent fishermen land well over 50 per cent of the fish in the Maritimes but were never included in the discussions on industry restructuring. Similarly, we were not consulted when this Bill was proposed. How can we rest assured that the federal Government will ever consult with us on the operation of the fishing industry, or the massive companies now to be controlled by the Government.

They went on to say:

Not only was there no consultation with us, but there was none with the smaller companies on whom we depend. They now are seeing the banks reduce their lines of credit by 33 per cent to the small buyers. What will the Government do to restore banking confidence in the 700 independents which are vital to us?

The Minister of Fisheries for Prince Edward Island expressed equal concerns. In his brief to the committee he said: