

Inquiries of the Ministry

[English]

POLLUTION**MERCURY CONTAMINATION OF FISH IN LAKES
ERIE AND ST. CLAIR—COMPENSATION
FOR FISHERMEN**

Mr. Jack Cullen (Sarnia): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry. Following discussion and negotiation with the government of the province of Ontario I am wondering if his department will undertake to compensate those who will not qualify for unemployment insurance but will suffer a loss of income because of fish being poisoned by mercury? Will the department supplement their incomes to the level they would have earned except for the government's ban?

Hon. Jack Davis (Minister of Fisheries and Forestry): Mr. Speaker, a program of that kind is under consideration. I might mention that I am meeting tomorrow with the Minister of Lands and Forests and the Minister of Energy and Resources Management of Ontario about this particular problem.

Mr. Cullen: Would the minister consider making a statement on motions so that the fishermen in this particular area, and I am thinking also of the fishermen in the Lake Huron area, will know exactly where they stand and whether or not they should fish this year?

Mr. Davis: I hope we can make a statement soon, Mr. Speaker. I expect that the fishermen in that area would get the same treatment, or treatment equivalent to that received by fishermen in Newfoundland last year when they were faced with a similar situation.

Mr. W. B. Nesbitt (Oxford): Would the minister make a brief statement in reply to my question now, or on motions tomorrow, and clarify the situation as to whether these fish in Lake St. Clair and Lake Erie are poisonous or not? There are conflicting reports, Mr. Speaker, and no one wants to buy the fish. One day they are declared to be poisoned, and the next day they are declared not to be poisoned. Could the minister clarify the situation?

Mr. Davis: Perhaps I could say quite simply that the pickerel in Lake St. Clair do present a problem. Those from the extreme western end of Lake Erie are close to the very safe international standard of .5 parts per million. Those in the rest of Lake Erie, and that is the

[Mr. Caouette.]

great bulk of the Lake Erie perch fishery, are comparatively low in mercury, but we want to be sure, as a result of a long series of tests, that all our fish are safe from the consumers point of view.

Mr. Thomas S. Barnett (Comox-Alberni): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask a supplementary question of the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry on this subject. Could he tell us now, or in the statement on motions which was suggested, whether any steps are under way to ensure that the people responsible for creating the mercury pollution in these lakes will be paying some of the compensation required by the fishermen because of the loss of their fish catch?

Mr. Davis: Mr. Speaker, this is one of the topics for discussion with the Ontario ministers tomorrow.

[Later:]

Mr. R. E. McKinley (Huron): A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. Is the minister confirming that no fish with any dangerous level of mercury in them have been found in Lake Huron?

Mr. Davis: Mr. Speaker, we have no definite indication of a problem in Lake Huron. Tests, however, are being carried out in respect of all fish in the Great Lakes area.

SASKATCHEWAN RIVER—MERCURY CONTAMINATION OF FISH—PRECAUTIONS TO SAFEGUARD PUBLIC

Mr. S. J. Korchinski (Mackenzie): Mr. Speaker, may I ask the minister a supplementary question with regard to mercury pollution in the Saskatchewan River caused by the co-op plant in Saskatoon. Are adequate precautions being taken to safeguard the public? I do not necessarily mean the commercial fishermen but others who may be involved in sports fishing, and Indians who may rely on fishing for their livelihood?

Hon. Jack Davis (Minister of Fisheries and Forestry): Mr. Speaker, the situation on the Saskatchewan River is that the pollution from the plant was stopped within 48 hours of the determination of the source of the pollution, namely, the co-op plant downstream from Saskatoon. The situation is different on the prairies in that our Crown-owned Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation has been buying all the commercial catch from the Saskatchewan River system.