

hours today, I, unfortunately, have cancelled the reception to which I had invited hon. members for this evening. I will hold it tomorrow after the adjournment of the House, if there are any of you left.

● (1730)

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

[Translation]

Madam Speaker: It being five o'clock, the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper, namely, notices of motions (papers), private bills and public bills.

Motions Nos. 1 and 22 are allowed to stand by unanimous consent.

[English]

FRESHWATER FISH MARKETING CORPORATION

The House resumed from Thursday, July 10, 1980, consideration of the motion of Mr. Siddon:

That an humble address be presented to His Excellency praying that he will cause to be laid before this House copies of all correspondence, telegrams or other documents exchanged between the government, its departments and agencies and the governments of Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and the territorial council of the Northwest Territories, since January 1, 1978, relating to the review and restructuring of the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation.

Hon. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if we could have a few minutes for the House to settle down.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): Order, please. I wonder if hon. members would agree to hold their caucuses in the lobbies so that the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) may proceed.

Mr. McGrath: Mr. Speaker, I would like to say a few words on the motion which has been placed on the table by my colleague. I will commence by indicating that hopefully one day we will have a freedom of information act operative at least within the federal jurisdiction which would make these kinds of motions unnecessary. I see no reason why the government should take the position which it normally takes on these motions for the production of papers. I realize that we are dealing with areas of federal-provincial responsibility which would involve correspondence between the federal government and the provincial governments in this case but, notwithstanding the usual consent which one endeavours to obtain from provincial governments with regard to the tabling of such correspondence, I believe that there is no reason why the government should not accede to these normal requests to have correspondence, papers and documents relating to various subjects, tabled.

That is particularly so in the case of the motion placed before the House by my colleague. While I am not about to

Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation

divulge any of the discussions which went on between provincial ministers and myself while I had the privilege of being the minister of fisheries and oceans for Canada, because that would be a breach of trust, I can say without breaching any confidences that, in my view, there is nothing in those exchanges which would not withstand the scrutiny of the public or examination by members of this House.

Having said that, I think I must also say that today the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans (Mr. Henderson) laid upon the table of the House, under Standing Order 42, the report of the federal-provincial territorial committee of officials on the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation. Obviously we have not had an opportunity to examine that report, although I have had a chance to glance through it. I would suggest that in the absence of the other related documents, the correspondence and various papers connected with the study, hon. members will be at a considerable disadvantage, especially members of the constituencies in which the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation plays a role in serving the needs of the fishermen.

The report which was tabled today arose out of a meeting which was held about one year ago between the federal minister of fisheries and oceans and the five ministers of the provinces involved. Arising out of that meeting we commissioned a study by officials of federal, provincial and territorial governments. The result of that study is the document which was tabled in the House today. I wonder why it has taken so long to table that report. The report was scheduled to be presented to a meeting of ministers in Winnipeg which was planned for last April. At that meeting in April the two levels of government were to make a definite decision on the future of the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation.

While there have been a number of meetings at the officials' level, the meeting of the ministers has yet to take place. Perhaps the minister, if he participates in this debate, will tell us why this meeting has not taken place, and will explain why it has taken so long to lay upon the table of the House and to make public the results of the study.

I believe that the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation has served the fishermen of western Canada and the territories well. But the fact is it has in the last while lost the confidence of some of its clients and, hence, we had the meeting of ministers one year ago which resulted in the study now on the table of the House. I am not so sure that the problem will be solved merely by tabling the study. We must address ourselves to the political problems involved. For example, there is the problem arising out of the fact that there was, one year ago, no consensus on which way the corporation should go, how it should fulfil its mandate, whether or not it should be privatized, whether or not it should be placed under provincial jurisdiction, or whether it should remain as it is, essentially a federal Crown corporation.

● (1740)

I have more than a passing interest in this corporation, not only from my previous role as minister of fisheries and oceans