

Oral Questions

as well. However, the Minister made a very, very serious mistake in judgment. In doing so I believe that he contravened, probably deliberately, the Fisheries Inspection Act which bans the sale of fish that is tainted, decomposed, or unwholesome. That includes, of course, fish that is aesthetically offensive to man. Why did the Minister violate the Fisheries Inspection Act and allow that tuna to go on the market in the first place and cause all this damage?

Hon. John A. Fraser (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Speaker, I will repeat again what I think Members of the Opposition accepted yesterday. There was no hazard to health through any of this product. Under the present situation, citizens who believe that they are aggrieved by any application of the standards by inspectors have only one appeal, that is to the Minister. I listened to those grievances. I did not make the decision on whim or caprice, but as a consequence of two independent committees. On the basis of that advice I released the product.

I am sure that the Member, who has been a Minister of Fisheries, would be interested to know that it is my intention to bring about, as soon as possible, an adequate appeal procedure for such cases.

FISHERIES COUNCIL'S ADVICE

Mr. George Henderson (Egmont): Mr. Speaker, I was also extremely disturbed this morning when I learned that the Minister had placed a gag order on his own staff regarding this issue. I was disturbed because you do not restore confidence by muzzling the troops.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Henderson: Will the Minister accept the advice of the Fisheries Council of Canada and the industry, and publicly state in his place today that under no circumstances will he ever again overrule, for political expediency, the decisions of his inspectors regarding the quality of Canadian fish products?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. John A. Fraser (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Speaker, I can assure all Hon. Members that I will endeavour to do everything possible to ensure the high standard of Canadian fish products and to serve the fishing community to the best of my endeavours. I must say, though, that I do not appreciate, nor do I accept, any suggestion of political interference.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

[*Translation*]

CONDITION OF ATLANTIC REGION FISHERY—GOVERNMENT'S INTENDED MEASURES

Mr. Fernand Robichaud (Westmorland-Kent): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Fisheries and

Oceans, and I was very pleased with his statement. However, the fact remains that the Minister has plunged the Atlantic fisheries in a serious crisis that might result in a loss of jobs.

I would therefore ask the Minister what he intends to do to restore the industry's credibility and protect the jobs at risk as a result of his actions.

[*English*]

Hon. John A. Fraser (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member knows that I have as great a concern for jobs in the Atlantic fishery as has anyone. I can only say that the steps which I have taken today with my colleague should address any question of confidence in that regard.

[*Translation*]

MINISTER'S ACTIONS

Mr. Fernand Robichaud (Westmorland-Kent): I have a supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

To get back to my question, the Minister said that he was taking certain steps. What are those steps? I would like to know so I can give the Atlantic industry some reassurance. May I know what those steps are?

[*English*]

Hon. John A. Fraser (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Speaker, I thought it was obvious to all Hon. Members that I have today asked my colleague, the Minister of National Health and Welfare, to effect a seizure of the disputed stock.

Ms. Copps: That's it?

EXERCISE OF MINISTERIAL DISCRETION

Mr. Ray Skelly (Comox-Powell River): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister. The Minister of Fisheries appears to have overruled the Deputy Prime Minister, indicating in the House today that he will be setting up his own appeal procedure. Would the Prime Minister clarify exactly what is going on here with ministerial discretion?

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, I see nothing inconsistent between what the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans said and what I said in trying to be helpful to the Hon. Member's Leader. The Task Force on Program Review will be bringing forward, for consideration by the Cabinet, a recommendation that all food inspection services be consolidated in the Ministry of Health and Welfare.

We have just been discussing the overlap that exists in federal Departments. In provincial jurisdictions as well there are parallel food inspection services which we will have to discuss with our provincial colleagues in the hope of achieving a high-level, centralized food inspection service that guarantees the health and safety of all Canadians.