

N.W. Atlantic Fisheries Convention Act

have a full-scale debate on the situation that prevails on the east coast of Canada with respect to our fishing interests and our international commitments in relation thereto, because this is of continuing concern to the many thousands of Canadians in the Atlantic provinces who depend upon the fisheries for a living.

● (3:50 p.m.)

In my province the fishing industry is still the keystone of the economy, and in my view will be for a long time to come. The treaty—I suppose it is a treaty, a convention or an accord within a treaty—provides that Canada will share the right with other member countries to board foreign ships with a view to enforcing the regulations under ICNAF with regard to the use of fishing gear and the implementation and enforcement of conservation measures. We hope this initiative is not too late. My hon. friend from Gander-Twillingate (Mr. Lundrigan), who has taken commendable initiatives in the whole area of conservation, will have something to say on that matter in the debate.

There is, however, one area about which I am concerned and in respect of which I believe this bill will be totally ineffective. I refer to trying to protect our Atlantic salmon fishery from virtual extinction as a consequence of overexploitation by the Danes off Greenland, because by the very terms of this convention we can enforce the regulations only within our own area. There is no way our fisheries patrol vessels, which are small in number and size, can adequately protect this Canadian resource from overexploitation by another country. I say "Canadian resource", because the tragedy of it is that our country spends substantial amounts of money annually to provide hatcheries and spawning grounds and to keep our rivers open and provide the necessary protection for our salmon which go up the rivers off the east coast of Canada to spawn, only to be, upon returning to the sea, scooped up in thousands of tons by the Danes to be taken to their country to be processed, canned and perhaps even shipped into Canada as canned salmon.

This is a new problem for us. It is a very recent one because only within the last ten years have the Danes discovered one of the greatest mysteries of all, the location of the North Atlantic feeding ground of the Atlantic salmon. The Danes discovered this feeding ground off the coast of Greenland. Since that time they have been harvesting these salmon, the product of Canadian protection and of Canadian waters, in tens of thousands of pounds.

As an illustration it might be worth while to place a few statistics on the record. The total Danish catch, in pounds of salmon, in 1960 was 220,000. In 1961 it remained at 220,000 pounds. In that year, however, they made their great discovery, and the catch went up to 661,000 pounds in 1962. In 1963 it went up to 1,100,000 pounds. In 1964 it rose to 3,306,000 pounds. In 1965 it was down again, but still substantially up at 1,760,000 pounds. In 1966 the figure was 2,865,000 pounds. In 1967 it was 2,865,000 pounds. In 1968 it was 1,300,000 pounds, and in 1969 it was 2,865,000 pounds. Estimates are not available for 1970.

[Mr. McGrath.]

It is interesting to note that our own catch of this valuable resource has remained virtually the same. Of course, there is a good reason for this. We have taken great steps to conserve this very important resource, important both as a commercial fishery and as a sports fishing industry in respect of tourism. Our catch has remained virtually the same at about three million pounds. The only difference is that we catch these salmon because they are a product of our scientific research, of our conservation policy and of the expense and effort we put into protecting our rivers from pollution, from poaching and from other things which would greatly deplete the stocks of salmon.

We have been notably unsuccessful in our efforts to prevail upon the Danes to substantially reduce their catch with a view to avoiding total extinction of the species. There is varying evidence in this regard, but I submit that unless something is done immediately the Atlantic salmon will be extinct in ten years. I think, therefore, we must, as a consequence of our failure to obtain meaningful agreement with the Danes, look at our position within ICNAF because this is supposed to be the international forum in which this type of agreement is reached. I want to know why we cannot get the Danes to reduce their catch of salmon.

Only a few days ago the Norwegians introduced regulations to reduce the catch of salmon off Greenland. So the Norwegians are concerned and are doing something about it. Also, just a few days ago our own minister issued a statement concerning new regulations aimed at protecting the species within our own jurisdiction. I am sorry the minister is not here. Perhaps he is more concerned with clean air and the rather attractive subject of pollution than he is with the cold, hard reality of dealing with this very important bread and butter industry.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries (Mr. Corbin) is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Corbin: Mr. Speaker, perhaps the hon. member would allow me to explain that the minister has been called out of the House for perhaps ten minutes. I am taking notes and will keep the minister informed of the hon. member's points.

Mr. McGrath: Mr. Speaker, I was commencing to refer to a statement made on March 12 by the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry (Mr. Davis) in respect of the introduction of new and strong regulations aimed at preserving the species within our own jurisdiction. I might say I do not agree with many of these regulations. It would seem that the minister expects Canadians to bear the burden of the overexploitation being carried on by the Danes: Canadian fishermen must bear the consequences of the failure of this government to bring full pressure to bear on the Danish government to substantially reduce the Danish catch off Greenland. I think this is regrettable.

These regulations will in my province have the effect of denying to the people the traditional right they have enjoyed of catching fish any time they wish. We now