

Oral Questions

However, since 1987, when mink prices reached an all-time high, the industry has been undermined by the actions of both the anti-fur lobby and especially the expansion in the Scandinavian countries. The result is an over-supply of pelts that has pushed the mink industry to the brink of complete collapse.

This is a solid industry. It possesses top quality pelts and a well trained labour force of farmers. It has been profitable and, with government attention, it will remain so. In order to ensure the Canadian mink farmers can survive this rough period, I call on the Minister of Agriculture to support the industry's request that mink be immediately added to the list of eligible commodities under the Agricultural Stabilization Act.

Time is growing short for these farmers. Many of them exist in Ontario, Quebec and Nova Scotia and they have had a very difficult year. I ask the Minister of Agriculture to take it under consideration.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[*English*]

FISHERIES

Mr. Fernand Robichaud (Beauséjour): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Prime Minister.

It is now more than a year that the government has known about the fishery crisis in Atlantic Canada. Since then, the government has been promising action, but these promises have turned out empty. The promised \$1 billion response program has melted to \$130 million.

The long term response and new programs have disappeared and have been replaced by existing programs. Most Canadians agree that where the government has rightfully offered aid to the western farmers, Atlantic Canadians have been left on their own to deal with that crisis.

Will the Deputy Prime Minister take the opportunity to announce immediately what aid he intends to give in order that Atlantic Canadians will feel that they have been treated fairly and that they will be able to face their future with dignity and not despair?

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member acknowledged

in his question, there has already been the announcement of \$130 million assistance to some of the people affected by the obvious crisis in the Atlantic fishery.

We are looking at other programs that might be made available to help people who are affected by this crisis. As part of a program by the Government of Canada, and we very much hope in concert with the provinces of Newfoundland and Nova Scotia and we certainly expect in concert with the fishing industry, we hope to try to establish the long term viability of the Canadian fishing industry on the Atlantic coast, having regard to the fact that there has been inadequate planning in the past. There have been decisions taken in part by provincial governments that in hindsight were not intelligent decisions. We have had a very serious problem arise with respect to the northern cod stock. The hon. member will know that Dr. Harris, who was asked to look into the question of scientific assessments, has made his report available to my colleague, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, who is looking at that report now.

On the basis of that evidence and other, we will be announcing further programs in keeping with the commitment to treat the crisis in the Atlantic fishing industry with the same priority that we have treated the crisis in agriculture in other parts of the country.

Mr. Simmons: Explain that to the Prime Minister.

Mr. Fernand Robichaud (Beauséjour): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is also to the Deputy Prime Minister. All we hear are words, words that mean nothing at all. Up to now all the government has offered to Atlantic Canadians affected by the crisis is a recipe of rehashed programs with no new funding. The existing programs were in place to deal with a normally bad situation. They were not made to deal with a crisis situation like the one we have now. Furthermore, these existing programs, as the minister knows, have been reprofiled, reduced and extended over a longer period of time. They did not and do not meet the needs.

• (1420)

How can the minister and the government justify abandoning Atlantic Canada, or is this lack of action consequent with the Prime Minister's words that there is no crisis in Atlantic Canada?