

Freshwater Fisheries

Watson), and number No. 20 in the name of the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker) shall stand at the request of the government. Is it agreed?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

[English]

HOUSE OF COMMONS

SUGGESTED ESTABLISHMENT OF STANDING COMMITTEE ON FRESHWATER AND INLAND FISHERIES

Mr. Cecil Smith (Churchill) moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, the Standing Orders of this House should be amended to provide that there shall be a Standing Committee on Freshwater and Inland Fisheries, distinct from the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Forestry, to which shall be exclusively referred all matters relating to the freshwater and inland fisheries of Canada.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to speak on this motion. The freshwater fishery of Canada is close to my heart and to the hearts of my constituents. The commercial, gill net freshwater fishery in many constituencies represents an important way of life. Freshwater fishing in Manitoba provides an important economic base and it is my concern that this valuable industry shall be kept alive and fishermen allowed the opportunity to remain in the freshwater fishing industry despite drawbacks—and believe me there are many—which have plagued them for years.

I am also concerned because freshwater fishermen are being short-changed because they do not receive from Ottawa the same recognition which coastal fisheries receive. I specifically refer to the present inability of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Forestry to deal adequately with the freshwater fishing industry. It is my conclusion that this standing committee does not—nay, cannot—spend enough time monitoring the workings of the freshwater fishery.

Today I shall propose to hon. members of this House that a separate committee be established to deal solely with the freshwater fishing industry of Canada. In doing so I have endeavoured to assimilate enough facts so that I can cogently present my ideas as to why a standing committee on freshwater and inland fisheries is desirable and, indeed, necessary.

● (1600)

First, let me review the history of the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation, the federal Crown corporation which, in effect, is the commercial freshwater fish marketing board in this country. I will then show how difficulties with the corporation and with the freshwater fishing industry in general have not been adequately dealt with in the respective standing committee of the House in the past.

The Freshwater Fish Marketing Act was assented to on February 27, 1969, and came into force May 1, 1969, at which time the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation was established for the purpose of marketing and trading

[The Acting Speaker (Mr. McCleave).]

in fish, fish products and by-products, in and out of Canada. The corporation has the exclusive right in inter-provincial and export trade to market the products of the commercial fishery of the provinces participating in the program. The provinces, under Section 25 of the act, include the Northwest Territories, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and western Ontario. As well, the object of the corporation is to increase returns to fishermen, promote markets, and increase inter-provincial and export trade.

The quality of the commercial freshwater fish that is regulated and handled by the corporation is comparable to any in Canada. Indeed Canada is unique in having a freshwater fishing industry that in many cases is the livelihood of hundreds of individuals and is the sole economic base of many regions.

Fishermen, however, have run into difficulties with their seasonal occupation since the Freshwater Fish Marketing Act was implemented in 1969. First of all—and this would especially apply to the province of Manitoba and in particular to my riding of Churchill—many fishing operations were disrupted as they were turned over to local co-operatives that would act as agents to the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation. Fishermen were lost and some fishing was abandoned at this time because of alternative local job opportunities in the fields of farming, lumber, and logging, mechanics, carpentry, and general contracting, although hydro development in the north was a major controlling factor.

Many of the large commercial freshwater fish operations were out of production between 1972 and 1974. This was a crucial changeover period, the beginning of a regulated freshwater fishing industry that set the stage for a whole new area of responsibility for members of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Forestry.

Then there was one of the most devastating examples of how fishermen in Manitoba and other member provinces were adversely affected by the actions of the corporation. I am talking now of the long standing strike at the freshwater fish marketing plant at Transcona, Manitoba. If members will recall, that strike began with a walkout of plant employees on October 11, 1974, after they had worked without a contract since March of that year. The strike that officially went into effect the following day ended with a new contract settlement five weeks later—after the near destruction of the freshwater fishery in Churchill constituency, and throughout the province the Transcona strike caused losses for fishermen who were not able to catch their quota before the strike began. This is unacceptable in light of the fact that the corporation was aware that its employees might eventually strike once their contract had expired. Yet no additional cold storage facilities were made available, and fishermen were ordered to pull up their nets and stop fishing.

These fishermen had virtually no one to go to bat for them. They had no federal body which they felt confident they could turn to, so many of them blamed the provincial government for inaction in regard to settlement of the strike. Had there been an exclusive freshwater and inland fisheries committee—or at least a special committee to which these fishermen could have presented their grievances—then the situation could have been different. The Fisheries and Forestry Standing Committee, as it is pres-