

*Motion for Papers*

dealing with the waste material from the Electric Reduction Company plant at Long Harbour.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, as the member for the riding in which the people were seriously affected, I feel I am entitled to all the information and all the correspondence that was exchanged between this government, its agencies, the Bedford Institute of Oceanography, the government of Newfoundland and the Electric Reduction Company of Canada. As I said before, because a similar motion had been made by another member my original motion was set aside. I believe there are many questions which have not been answered so far as this pollution tragedy is concerned.

**Hon. Jack Davis (Minister of Fisheries and Forestry):** Mr. Speaker, perhaps I should begin by saying to the hon. member for St. John's West (Mr. Carter) that the department and the government have no intention of withholding any correspondence relating to this very important subject. Earlier, it was indicated to the hon. member and to others that we would have to obtain the permission of the government of Newfoundland before we could table all the correspondence. This permission was sought and we were told at the time that the government of the province of Newfoundland would prefer to withhold the correspondence until after the matter of compensation to the fishermen of the Placentia Bay area, which was then before the courts, was dealt with by the courts. Subsequently, indeed within the last two weeks, a settlement was reached out of court and the fishermen in question have had assurance that they will be compensated. The matter is no longer before the courts and we are therefore in the process again of endeavouring to obtain the consent of the province of Newfoundland to table all the correspondence involved.

I do not want the hon. member for St. John's West or any other member to feel we have anything to hide in this connection. Indeed, I would go so far as to say we are very proud of the people in the Department of Fisheries and the Fisheries Research Board who worked on this problem over the past year. We have a situation today at Long Harbour, which is a small harbour off Placentia Bay, where, looking back on what has been a very difficult situation over the last 12 months, we have the best of both worlds. The plant is operating again. There are some 400 plant employees receiving pay cheques for

[Mr. Carter.]

gainful employment at the plant. The fishery is back in reasonably good shape. So far as we can determine the fishery is in as good shape as it has ever been.

We have passed through a very difficult year for the fishermen and a very difficult year so far as measures to control pollution in that area are concerned. The hon. member for St. John's West mentioned a letter which is attributed to one of the members of the staff of the Department of Fisheries which was written and sent to someone I believe in the Electric Reduction Company in January of 1967. I hope I am correct. That was a year or so before I became minister. The letter relates to correspondence between the Electric Reduction Company and the federal Department of Fisheries. I am simply going on memory and this can be confirmed by the actual correspondence when it is tabled, but the Electric Reduction Company applied to the provincial government and to the Department of Fisheries as well as to other federal departments for authority to build a plant, and to have access to certain funds, rights and privileges. In this application, there was an explanation of their process and what the company expected to be the character of the effluent from the plant. A letter describing the nature of the effluent did come to our department. Looking back on that correspondence, I think the people in our department would say that it was not complete, that it did not contain a full and adequate description of what turned out to be the effluent from the plant.

• (5:10 p.m.)

In any case, our federal scientists and engineers reviewed the information supplied to them, checked the site and the process, and so far as they could determine from the plans outlined by the company there was not any danger of contamination of those waters or of the poisoning of large numbers of fish. I think we can say in retrospect that the information which the department received then was not a proper forecast of what in fact occurred. Certainly, it was not a good indication of the character of the effluent which did in fact leave that plant during its early starting-up phase. As a result of colloidal phosphorus being found in the effluent—and my recollection was that there was no mention of the possibility of colloidal phosphorus being in the effluent in the correspondence sent in by the company—a large number of herring were killed; cod were seriously affected, and other marine life was destroyed.