

Let me take a plant worker, a cutter, who probably makes maximum around \$11 an hour. With the number of weeks they have, their salary probably would get to about \$21,500. If there are bonuses in a good year, it may get to \$25,000. That in itself is a pathetic income.

Let me take it a little further. If they have to go on unemployment insurance, that income reduces to around \$17,000 or \$18,000 a year, which is well below the poverty line. I would suggest that it is not even subsistence allowance. But even that is not the problem. The problem is those people who do not even qualify for that \$18,000 a year. This is the crux of my argument here this evening.

The Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and the Minister of Employment and Immigration, and I think well-intentioned, have said that anybody who has a reasonable attachment to the fishery will be looked after. But last year, Madam Speaker, that was over 10,000 people—10,300 people. There was \$25 million allotted to that. That worked out to \$2,500 per person. The catch here is that the criteria that was used last year and the year before, and the year before that, is the same, despite the promises of the minister that there will be a lot of flexibility used. Essentially what we are looking at is this. To qualify for 10 weeks, if that is the qualification, you must have either had 10 weeks or three weeks with last year all your stamps in the fishery alone.

If you cascade that effect, essentially it means that there will never be any qualification at all.

What the minister in fact has promised in his answer is the real reason I am here this evening. I want to just restate what he said. I want confirmation from the hon. parliamentary secretary, my friend who is working overtime this evening, that this is the case. The minister said: "If there is need for any additional assurance programs, assistance programs, they will be forthcoming".

The other thing he said was: "When we know later in the year exactly what the effects are, other programs if necessary will be put into place."

That, to me, is a very firm commitment. It does not talk about flexibility, it does not talk about interpretation by the bureaucracy. It says to me essentially, and I would like confirmation from my friend, the member from

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Fraser Valley East, that those who need it will be looked after.

If I can get that assurance, I will go home happier tonight and I think a lot of my constituents will be as well.

Mr. Ross Belsher (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency): Madam Speaker, to the hon. member opposite from Bonavista—Trinity—Conception, the announcement the minister made on February 24 concerning the northern cod catch was indeed a very significant announcement and something that no minister ever wants to have to make, particularly as it is dealing with people's livelihoods.

The minister's response was very comprehensive with the primary goal that of the sustainability of the northern cod.

The member opposite is talking about whether or not the government will be there to assist the people who fall between the cracks. I can tell him that this government has taken significant initiatives during the last several months to assist the Atlantic region of Canada, and this government will continue to be responsive to the needs of the people of Atlantic Canada whose livelihoods depend on the northern cod.

With the shutting down of the directed fisheries for cod by offshore vessels until the fall and the limiting of the catches by the inshore mobile fleet to the average of recent years, the traditional fixed gear inshore fishery will continue to operate without quotas or other limits on its catches.

The trawlermen and the offshore plant workers who are immediately affected by these measures are almost all eligible for unemployment insurance. Beyond that, assistance is available pursuant to the \$584 million of the Atlantic Fisheries Adjustment Program. As well, the minister has made it clear that those affected by the lowering of the total catch this year will be assisted.

I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that our own conservation matters can only go so far in trying to get this problem corrected, and it is going to take us several months to get around it as far as getting the fishery back up to the levels that we have enjoyed in times past.