

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

The beaches and shores of the west arm were littered with dead whitefish. I have talked with fishermen who claim that large numbers of them were also found in the main lake. However, the west arm of Kootenay Lake appeared to be the main source of the kill. It is disturbing suddenly to find thousands of fish dying, with blood oozing from their fins and tails and a white growth around their gills. One report suggests that they were killed by a fungus disease. A number of other possible causes were suggested, such as poisoning by pesticides or residue from heavy metals.

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of this whole affair is that it vividly illustrates the very limited and inadequate research facilities that exist in Canada for checking into fish diseases. We have many competent biologists in this country. A number were sent into the area to check on the whitefish, but it appears that lack of research facilities greatly hampered them in finding the cause of the fish mortality. I understand that samples of the fish were sent to the federal government's biological research station at Nanaimo, but it appears that Nanaimo has neither the facilities nor the specialists to handle research projects associated with viruses. Other samples were later sent to the Western Disease Laboratory in Seattle, Washington. This points up the urgent need for expanded research facilities in this field in Canada.

● (10:10 p.m.)

Once a disease strikes fish, as it did in the west arm of Kootenay Lake, it is urgent that a very early assessment of the cause be made. In this day and age, with water pollution problems becoming more serious every day, we can expect to find other cases of fish diseases and it is a cheap investment to protect our fisheries with the most up-to-date research facilities possible. I would suggest that a possible site for one of these modern research stations is right in the centre of the Kootenay country where we have one of the finest fishing areas to be found in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, I hope the minister will be able to give us the full story on the whitefish kill which I have mentioned and that he will be able to outline the measures needed to prevent a repetition of this disaster. I also hope he will press for an immediate increase in the research facilities required to cope with any and all types of fish disease. This heritage is too precious to lose because of lack of knowledge due to inadequate research

[Mr. Harding.]

facilities, or the lack of enforcement facilities if pollution problems need to be checked.

Hon. Jack Davis (Minister of Fisheries and Forestry): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Kootenay West (Mr. Harding) asked whether the federal Department of Fisheries has completed its investigation into the whitefish kill in Kootenay Lake during the summer. The answer is no, we have not completed our investigation. This is a freshwater lake. The waters do not flow through salmon streams into the ocean. This lake therefore comes under the jurisdiction of the provincial authorities. As the hon. member undoubtedly knows, our fishery authority, is delegated to the provinces in respect of freshwater lakes and streams across the nation. Any lake which is freshwater comes under the provincial authority, in this case the British Columbia Fish and Game Branch.

The provincial people collected samples of the whitefish killed during the summer. They immediately alerted our people at the Fisheries Research Board and various studies have been carried out. We know definitely that the cause is not pollution in the sense of waste, for example, from one of the mines in the area. I believe there is only one mine in the immediate vicinity which produces heavy metals. There is no indication that lead, zinc, and so on, are the source of the problem. There is no evidence, either, that insecticides or pesticides caused the fish kill. It is thought, as the hon. member mentioned, that a disease is the cause, but the nature of the disease has not been finally established.

It is not for lack of effort or indeed lack of competence on the part of the people in the Fisheries Research Board that the evidence is not conclusive. We have one of the largest and finest biological stations anywhere in the world at Nanaimo, and we have also involved the scientists at the University of British Columbia and in the U.S. Pacific northwest. We need more research effort, as the hon. member suggested, in respect of fisheries and we need improved facilities. But the fishing industry in Canada, in relation to the value of our output, attracts the largest research development anywhere. Between 6 per cent and 7 per cent of the gross value of the product is invested by the taxpayers in research and development. So it is not for lack of competent people and research facilities that we still do not have the answer to this particular problem on Kootenay Lake.