

Oral Questions

been reduced then to 90,000 tonnes. We are still one-third higher after four years.

When is the minister going to take these reports seriously and get the quotas down to where Professor Harris said they should be?

Hon. John C. Crosbie (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency): Mr. Speaker, let us have some accuracy in this matter. Dr. Harris' report was presented to the government in 1990 which I calculate to be two years ago.

Nowhere in his report did he say that the TAC should be reduced to 90,000 tonnes. He suggested that the management tool we use of F0.1, which allows one to take 16 to 20 per cent of the biomass of some particular stock each year, was the correct way to proceed. In the present circumstances we should try to keep the catch at a rate of 0.30 because we could not operate at 0.1. Since then he has said that we should be very cautious and he has recommended that TACs be reduced more than we have reduced them. But we have set the TACs in accordance with the advice of Canadian scientists, CAF-SAC advice, and at no time have we set quotas any higher than was recommended by our own scientists.

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SOFTWOOD LUMBER INDUSTRY

Mr. Joe Comuzzi (Thunder Bay—Nipigon): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Acting Prime Minister.

The softwood lumber industry, because of the 14.5 per cent surtax, today is really in shambles. The immediate problem is: What can we do about this terrible problem today?

• (1440)

The present situation is not unlike what happened in 1971 when our American friends imposed a 10 per cent surcharge on Canadian exports to the United States. The Employment Support Act was passed specifically to remedy that type of unfair taxation by the United States.

Will the minister take this question as our representation to invoke the terms of this act immediately as a

countermeasure to what the Americans have done to the softwood lumber industry of Canada?

Hon. Tom Hockin (Minister of State (Small Businesses and Tourism)): Mr. Speaker, of course we will take any representation from the hon. gentleman, but I have to tell him that the big problem with 1971 was that they did not have a dispute settlement mechanism to help them solve the problem. They had to reach out and provide more public funds from the Canadian taxpayer to handle the problem.

What we are trying to do is make sure that American taxpayers who are going to have to pay more for houses as a result of this decision, American taxpayers who will have to pay for this wrong decision on the part of the Americans, will pay for the bad decision they have made with respect to this matter.

What we have is a dispute settlement mechanism now which we did not have in 1971. I think our case is so strong we may not even have to use that mechanism. But if we do, we will and we will use it vigorously.

Mr. Joe Comuzzi (Thunder Bay—Nipigon): I have a supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. That answer is totally unacceptable. I am talking about a problem that exists today.

At the time of the dispute settling mechanism we could go to GAIT. What I am talking about today is an interim measure. In 1971 when the countermeasure, the Employment Support Act, was introduced, it only took three days to pass through this House with all-party support. Let me add that at that time all parties in the House gave full co-operation to the passing of this act.

As an interim measure to help every softwood lumber industry and employee in Canada, I ask the minister to invoke this Employment Support Act today. He should not only invoke it but make it retroactive to the date the Americans imposed the tax, March 6, so that we can show them we have the ability to counteract moves they make in our export business.

Hon. Tom Hockin (Minister of State (Small Businesses and Tourism)): Mr. Speaker, that bill passed, if it did, in three days because there were no other options available to the Government of Canada.