

*Government Orders*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I realize the hon. member rose. However, I am sure he noticed the Speaker had risen before he did to call the minister to order for making a comment he should not have made, and he knows that perfectly well. I think we can proceed. The minister has the floor.

**Mr. Valcourt:** Madam Speaker.

**An hon. member:** You can leave!

**Mr. Valcourt:** Okay, you can leave, François!

**An hon. member:** Gone again!

• (1620)

**Mr. Valcourt:** Madam Speaker, hon. members are aware that a few days ago, the government tabled in the House a bill to amend the Fisheries Act in order to achieve certain objectives, which are entirely in line with the commitment our government made in the Atlantic region not long ago, when I had an opportunity to announce the fisheries adjustment program.

As you know, Madam Speaker, I have been Minister of Fisheries and Oceans for slightly more than three months. Upon my appointment, I immediately went to the Atlantic region where I had consultations with people in the fisheries industry. I spoke to fishermen, plant owners and unions representing plant workers, and I met various ministers representing provincial governments throughout the Atlantic region. Everywhere it was clear from the situation in the fisheries that certain provisions in our present legislation were not really adequate to allow us to meet the objectives we, as the government, wanted to pursue in the Atlantic region.

When I went to regions like —

[*English*]

—whether it is Lockeport, Canso, or any area of Newfoundland, including Gaultois or wherever, people made the point to me and my colleagues that if we were going to really try to rebuild the fish stocks, then certain measures had to be taken. These must be measures not only in terms of putting more money into rebuilding fish stocks, or trying to put more scientific effort into trying to rebuild these fish stocks, but conservation measures would also have to be taken.

Among these measures outlined by fishermen in Atlantic Canada and also on the Pacific Coast, where I went a couple of days after, was the need for us to take steps to reduce the over-fishing, the discarding, the high grading at sea—things that happened in the past which had a bad effect on the stocks.

I am talking about the minority now, very few people, but for too many still a fine under the Fisheries Act was the equivalent to a cost of doing business. Looking at the dispositions in the Fisheries Act, the government decided that incurring a fine when the Fisheries Act is violated is not a cost of doing business. It proposed increased fines under this bill. Some will claim that they are very large, and they are. But that just goes to show how serious this government is about protecting the fish resources. At a time when Atlantic Canadians especially depend on this resource, it is unacceptable that we would continue to consider violating the Fisheries Act or a fine ensuing the violation of the act simply as a cost of doing business.

The bill before the House today proposes to increase dramatically these fines so that those who choose to violate the act can no longer consider that these heavy fines are simply a cost of doing business. Quite literally, the magnitude of these fines will ensure that violating the act will not be considered as a cost of doing business. Tribunals and the courts will conclude the importance that Parliament attaches to this act because of the range of fines prescribed in these amendments. We could literally wipe those who violate the act out of business with this range of fines.

The other aspect of these increased fines is that, and you know too often, Madam Speaker—

[*Translation*]

—there are people who want to take the credit for certain projects, especially in politics. There are people who like to brag and take the credit for what happens. Of course my government wants the credit for introducing amendments to the Fisheries Act, but my point is that the fishermen themselves initiated the amendments that were introduced today in the House. The fishermen asked our department, my colleagues and various members on both sides of the House to introduce strict measures to preserve this resource. Madam Speaker, I must admit that when the Prime Minister asked me to go to Fisheries and Oceans, I did not have a clear picture of our fishermen, either on the Atlantic or the Quebec or