

*Adjournment Debate***PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT
MOTION***[English]*

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 40 deemed to have been moved.

**FISHERIES—EXTENSIVE HERRING KILL IN BAY OF FUNDY—
REQUEST FOR DETERMINATION OF CAUSE AND ASSISTANCE TO
FISHERMEN**

Mr. Fred McCain (Carleton-Charlotte): Mr. Speaker, on December 7 of last year I asked a question on behalf of some of the fishermen of Grand Manan who had experienced a very serious loss of income as a result of circumstances absolutely and completely beyond their control. These people have presented their case to the staff of the Ministry of the Environment. They have been patient, they have been polite, and they have not been demanding. They have merely presented the facts of the case as they saw them on their own behalf. They made all the expenditures that would have been necessary for a fruitful season, but they reaped no harvest whatsoever as they cast their nets upon the water.

I rise tonight to appeal on their behalf. I think that if we examine the report on expenditures by the Department of the Environment through its fisheries branch, we will find that the department has aided and assisted a great many people in the fishing industry in Canada. It seems only fair, then, that the same spirit, the same degree of recognition, should be shown to these people as has been shown judiciously and properly to others in Canada, including fellow fishermen. I think it is discrimination to leave these people out, particularly so in view of the very gentlemanly position which they have adopted and the very fine way in which they have presented their case.

● (2200)

I think it is necessary to take into consideration the basic economy of the island of Grand Manan. There is probably no community in Canada more dependent upon a single source of income than that island. Except for a very short tourist season which makes some contribution, the income of many on the island is based principally on fish. When any portion of this income is denied fishermen of that area, by virtue of an act of God or man, the economy of the area suffers.

Fishing is not a guaranteed income; by its nature it is cyclical. This is particularly pertinent to this group of fishermen this year because it was one of the perhaps two out of five years they could have anticipated a very generous and adequate income. The weir fisherman is one who must accept that perhaps not more than two out of five years are going to be really prosperous. With good luck in the other years of that five he would recover his investment, and in the fifth year would make virtually nothing.

It is not only unfortunate that a weir may be found to be absolutely fruitless for an entire fishing season, but in this particular season fish were in an abundance rarely seen any-

[Mr. Roche.]

where, and the anticipated income was the one they needed in the five-year period to give them a decent average.

These people have not made an exorbitant demand upon the public treasury of Canada but merely asked that they be assisted as weir fishermen have been in the past. Their presentation indicated what their income might have been, and they asked that the minister recognize that and give them assistance on a fair basis. Some of their claims have been regarded as very high but I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, in view of the presence of fish at that particular time, they have not exaggerated what their income might have been had not circumstances interfered.

The fishermen of these parts have been hampered by regulations, licensing, and stock control. The income of the area has suffered seriously, and the processing industry has found it difficult to survive. This is an island which I think should have special consideration in every respect in regard to fishing. The licensing structure has hampered them severely. When you have no other source of income, and when it is restricted by the imposition of quotas and licenses, then the flexibility of earning power has been licensed out of existence. A few extra days of effort in another field might have added to their income, but they are denied that. They are abused by the licensing structure. It is not as if these people were on the mainland of New Brunswick or Nova Scotia where they might have an opportunity to earn money from other sources; their basic and only income is from fishing.

I submit that when a group of people such as this is denied the opportunity to reap the harvest through circumstances not of their making, the minister should take that into consideration and treat them as other fishermen in Canada. They should have some compensation.

Mr. Jim Fleming (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Fisheries and the Environment): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member is well aware, a thorough investigation of the herring kill of last summer has been carried out by the research scientists at the St. Andrews Biological Station in New Brunswick. All evidence indicates that the herring kill was due to natural causes as opposed to an explosion. The results of this investigation, including a report from the Department of National Defence, were brought to the hon. member's attention as well as that of the fishermen involved at a meeting held on Grand Manan a few weeks ago. The claims for the loss of income by the fishermen are understandable, but in the light of these results it has not been possible to compensate those affected by the kill.

However, the minister as well as his officials realize fully that there are a number of problems faced by the weir fishermen which need to be addressed, such as the instability of catches by the weirs. In this connection a second meeting was called by the Department of Fisheries and the Environment to discuss these problems with the weir fishermen. These meetings were well-attended, useful, and have established the potential to implement some long-term changes in the weir fishery, principally the development of a catch-insurance