

men, they cannot arrest their next door neighbours and their children, and haul them before a magistrate. The odium is too great, and therefore an outsider should be appointed.

Fish-breeding..... \$263,000

Mr. DAVIES (P.E.I.) I am not going to enter into a discussion of the very large and important question which is presented to the House here in the vote which we are now asked to concur in. The department, so far, have adhered to their policy of attempting to promote the fisheries by the establishment of fish-breeding establishments; and I suppose that at the present time there is hardly sufficient information before the House to enable it to form any positive opinion upon the utility of this expenditure. I am not going to quote isolated opinions on this, although we have some opinions which are entitled to weight, and which go to show that we are spending ten times as much money as we get returns for. I wish rather to draw the attention of the hon. gentleman to one specific point in connection with this vote, and that is the lobster fisheries in the Maritime Provinces. These are very important fisheries. The amount of money they yield and bring into the country every year, the number of men to whom they give employment, and who are engaged in these fisheries, are of themselves sufficient evidence of their great importance. The hon. Minister knows well that year after year there has been a constant struggle going on between the department and this trade for the closing of the lobster fisheries, and to agree upon some plan which will promote and improve the lobster grounds, and against those who are determined to fish them out at all hazards and at all seasons. Now, a great difference of opinion exists. The hon. gentleman appointed a commission some years ago, and I must say the commission presented a report which did not seem to me to be fruitful of very much thought, nor to be productive of very much good; but the result of it all was that the hon. gentleman determined—and, I think, correctly, from the judgment I could form—to shorten the time, not to lease the grounds, as it was once intended to do, to individuals, but to allow them to fish as they had been fishing, but still to form a close season, and to allow them to fish for a very short period, I think from the 1st of May to the middle of July—I speak now with reference to the Island. The results went to show that that was an eminently wise position, and I will challenge contradiction to the fact that after the close season had been in operation for two years the results were very highly satisfactory, and the lobsters have increased so greatly that some gentlemen who had thought of removing their factories to Newfoundland and other places determined to continue the fishery in Prince Edward Island. There was every promise, therefore, of a reasonable and fair catch for the present and for future years, and I think the best men engaged in the fishery, although they entertain, many of them, different ideas about it, have all come to the conclusion, after the experience of one or two seasons, that the policy of shortening the time for catching lobsters solved the whole question; at any rate, it solved it to such an extent that the grounds were improving, the quantity caught was enormously increased, and there did not seem to be any reason why, if that was adhered to, we should not have for many years to come, perhaps for all time

Mr. DAVIES (P.E.I.)

to come, a continuance of that rich and productive industry. Now, for some reason or other, owing to some pressure, I do not know what, the hon. gentleman reversed his policy this year, and when that close-season had expired, on the 15th of July, I suppose on the application of a number of packers, he extended the time further. What was the result? The result is, that the grounds are being fished out again, and next year the results will be very much worse, of course, than they are this. On the one hand, he has paid out large sums of money to breed lobsters, and on the other hand he has extended the time during which they can be caught, and has left the lobster fisheries to be depleted. I will read to him a letter which I received from the owner of the large lobster factories the other day on this subject, and it shows, I think, the opinion of, by long odds, a majority of the lobster packers—I do not mean to say in number; I do not mean to say that a large number of smaller lobster packers would not desire to extend the time for a month, or six weeks, or two months; they would keep it open as long as they can catch fish, whether the fish is in a proper condition to catch or not. But I say the better class of the fishermen desire that this fishery should be conserved and protected, and do not desire to see the extension of time. I think the policy adopted by the department this year was a ruinous policy. The hon. gentleman is educating the lobster packers up to the belief that no rule or order passed by the department will resist the application of political influence. Now, I want him to explain, to-night, why it was that the season was extended when it worked so well the year previous. The letter to which I refer reads as follows:—

“The Marine and Fisheries Department are playing the mischief with our Island lobster fisheries. For your information, in case you may use it in debate, I will state the position. About six or seven years ago they wisely shortened the lobster fishing season from the 1st of May to the 16th of July. The waters of the Gulf had been fished out previously by allowing lobsters to be caught pretty much all the open season, and they had become so scarce that nearly all the small factories had to close and the large ones were hardly making both ends meet. There has been a marked improvement since, and for the last three years it has been a paying business. In addition to shortening the season, the regulations as to size and spawn fish have been very stringent, and the factories have been watched, fines, &c., inflicted. Of course, most of the factories thought the regulations were too stringent, but I am not going to enter upon that question now. They were all pretty generally agreed upon this point, namely, that with a view of preserving the industry the open season was long enough. Some few of the large factories would have preferred the season shortened to the 1st of July. This year, without rhyme or reason, the Minister extended the season to the 1st of August. Mr. Prowse, I, and some other large packers, close on the 15th of July. We considered the extension of time destructive of the business, and would not take advantage of it, but small packers have been fishing straight along up to the 12th instant, and have not been molested. The worst feature in the extension of time is that a large proportion of spawn lobsters come on the grounds about the middle of July, and the fish are also not in a good condition for canning, as it is the shell-casting season. Curiously enough, the Government have an artificial herring establishment on Pictou Island, and are at the same time allowing the ova-bearing lobsters to be destroyed by the thousands by giving the extension of time.”

I cannot put the matter as tersely and as lucidly as I think my correspondent has put it. He has very great experience in this business, extending over a great many years, has a very large number of factories, and an enormous amount of capital invested; and having read his letter, I submit his