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Mr. Speaker: Perhaps I do want to restate that the reason we are having this emergency debate is that there is a matter of great urgency. I know that all Hon. Members would want to hear from all those who wish to contribute to this debate. I am sure the Hon. Members would want to extend the appropriate courtesy to the Minister who is responding to the Hon. Member for Skeena who led off the debate.

Mr. Siddon: I think all Members will want to be attentive through the entire evening, and I appreciate the co-operation of the members of the Opposition.

We are prepared to take whatever steps may be needed to protect Canadian waters and shorelines if this oil should move toward us, which it has not.

We have provided the services of our respected herring biologists to assist the United States in planning measures to protect the herring which spawn in Prince William Sound. We have provided technical devices to help the United States track the presence of oil in the waters throughout the threatened area. We have provided the authority needed to bring oil-soaked otters from Alaska. I personally signed the authorization last Friday to bring oil-soaked otters to the Vancouver Aquarium to be treated and rehabilitated. This was a request received from wildlife officials in the State of Alaska. We are sending our specialists in this very sensitive discipline to Alaska to assist in saving as many marine mammals and species as possible.

We have taken these actions—

An Hon. Member: Did you give them an air ticket?

Mr. Siddon: Obviously opposition members do not want to hear what the Government is doing. They are just trying to exploit a situation for cheap political reasons that we all very much regret.

I can assure the House that this Government stands ready to deliver additional assistance as is required and to ensure the protection of our own coastal habitat.

In response to some points the Hon. Member for Skeena has raised, our scientists advise us that our herring stocks live very close to shore and do not migrate north into U.S. waters. Our scientists advise us that the salmon fry in Canadian waters are not at this time endangered in any way. They acknowledge that halibut spawn and that similar groundfish species and pollock which reside along what is called the margin of the Gulf of Alaska Continental Shelf may, as they mature, swim into Canadian waters. If the oil spill were to remain in

the Gulf of Alaska for an extended period of time, there might well be some damage to the halibut stocks which eventually will become part of the Canadian fishery.

We were assured by our scientists that our marine mammals, our seals and sea otters and sea lions from further south that live in Canadian coastal waters, would not be affected by this spill. We are certainly concerned about the whale populations which do not respect international boundaries. They are so precious to the people of British Columbia, in particular our orcas and grey whales. There is an absence of scientific knowledge on how these species travel and how they would be affected by surface oil slicks. We are certainly vigilant. This is an unprecedented situation, never before encountered in this magnitude. We have a great deal to learn. I acknowledge that to the House.

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If the oil which is not now moving in our direction were to change course and to threaten our shores, I can assure the House, and Canadians that we would act efficiently and quickly in accordance with a well thought out response plan, which the Government has developed and which other Ministers will describe later this evening, to respond to this kind of emergency.

Oil spills occur from time to time in Canadian marine waters, to our great sadness, but we are a nation which depends on oil. I do not imagine there is a Member opposite who will not return to his home tonight without using a little bit of hydrocarbon to get there. My Department's roles during these kinds of emergencies emanate from my responsibilities; first, to protect fish, marine mammals, shellfish and marine plants, and their habitat. Second, they are to ensure the wholesomeness of the fish products. Third, they are to provide scientific information and advice relating to the marine environment. Key actions taken by Fisheries and Oceans at the time of any spill are numerous and varied, but we are always on the scene as quickly as we know that there is a need to be there.

Under the National Marine Emergency Plan, co-ordinated by Transport Canada, we provide the on-scene commander appointed by Coast Guard, forecasts and climactic information on the physical state of the ocean, advice on oil spill movement, and on trajectory and revisions to trajectories based on currents, tides, waves and winds. We also provide the location immediately of critical fisheries resources and the timing and location of fishing activities that have to be taken into consideration.