

Supply—Fisheries

As it is, we are now discussing the estimates of the Department of Fisheries. In rising to a point of order, I merely want to indicate that we should resume study of that legislation, as the government house leader mentioned we would last night.

Mr. Robichaud: Mr. Chairman, when the house adjourned at about one o'clock, as it was not sure whether the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. MacEachen) would be back by two o'clock, it was agreed, after consulting with the hon. members that were present in the house, that we would proceed with the estimates of the Department of Fisheries this afternoon. That is why we are now discussing those estimates.

Mr. Caouette: Mr. Chairman, I note that the Minister of National Health and Welfare is indeed back from Kingston, and I suggest that we should return to consideration of Bill No. C-227, dealing with medical care insurance in Canada.

The Deputy Chairman: It is pursuant to an order of the house that we are proceeding with consideration of the estimates of the Department of Fisheries. The members present agreed unanimously that we would take up the estimates of the Department of Fisheries, when the sitting resumed at 2.30 p.m.

[English]

Mr. Herridge: Mr. Chairman, I shall be quite brief. I rise in the first place in support of the plea made by other members of the house, the hon. member for Comox-Alberni, the hon. member for Victoria (B.C.), the hon. member for Fraser Valley and others, in respect of the cruel killing of seals. Over the years we have received a great number of letters about this and during the last year particularly members all have received resolutions. This matter is also brought to our attention because today all of us received a letter from Mr. Charles D. Monk with an enclosed brochure on this question. I am not going to deal with this because I understand other members have done so at great length. I believe the minister informed the house at that time that some of the material in the brochure was incorrect. I would add my plea to that of the others that he have this matter further investigated to make sure, if it is required that these animals be slaughtered, that they be slaughtered in a humane manner.

[Mr. Caouette.]

Mr. Robichaud: Mr. Chairman, in order to prevent a lengthy debate on this subject I might be permitted to make a very brief statement regarding this letter and similar letters which are being received by hon. members. As hon. members know, in the last two years the Department of Fisheries has been keenly and directly interested in introducing measures which would prevent any cruelty whatsoever in the sealing operations. Last year, as hon. members also know, I myself was on the ice at the time of the sealing operations. We had with us at that time representatives of the Canadian S.P.C.A. and they witnessed the operations. We know that a very small number of members of the S.P.C.A. have advocated total abolition of sealing by Canadians. This I cannot accept.

I also have the responsibility to protect the fisheries of the Gulf of St. Lawrence. At the time of the sealing operations last year it was estimated there were over one million seals on the floating ice on the Gulf of St. Lawrence. We must take into consideration that an adult seal consumes from 12 to 15 pounds of fish a day. Since we also have the responsibility to protect the fisheries of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, we must consider what would happen in a period of less than 10 years if we were to abolish seal hunting completely. The fishery of the Gulf of St. Lawrence would practically disappear.

• (3:10 p.m.)

I do, however, take upon myself the responsibility to introduce, implement and enforce measures which will prevent undue cruelty during these operations. Following last year's seal hunt, we had a meeting in June with representatives of the S.P.C.A., representatives of the industry, and a number of other persons interested in the sealing operations. We are amending our regulations again in order to make them more complete and more binding. We can assure the general public that by adding to the number of officers who will supervise the operation and by increasing the transportation facilities, such as aeroplanes, helicopters and so on, we are taking every possible measure to take full control of this operation.

The new revised regulations have been completed. They have been sent to those who attended the meeting in June in order that we can have their comments before passing them by order in council. I assure hon. members that I take a special interest in the introduction and enforcement of measures which will prevent cruelty during the sealing