

which it accomplishes directly or indirectly through designated agents.

The corporation sets an initial price to be paid to the fishermen. It sees to it that the fish is processed, packed and sold either on the domestic market or abroad, mostly in the United States which buys 90 per cent of our catches. It later pays a refund to fishermen as a final payment. Assuming everything proceeds in a normal way, it would be a miracle if all those involved in such complex dealings, on their own admission, were to be totally satisfied.

Therefore it was no surprise, on December 4, 1979, following a meeting between the federal Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and his counterparts of the provinces and territories involved, to learn that they had looked into the role played by the corporation and wanted it defined for the future, and that a federal-provincial committee of officials was given the task of preparing an in-depth analysis of the processing and marketing activities of the corporation, as well as its administrative, financial and operational structures. The interested partners were to be informed of the results of such a study at a meeting to be held in Winnipeg before the end of April last.

The April, 1980, meeting was never held. On the one hand, the study was pursued and, on the other hand, there was an election and the former government, which had commissioned the study, experienced certain problems. The study was finally completed and the report, we are informed, was recently tabled. What more can we ask? That we undertake a further study over the head of the committee which was set up for the very purpose? Personally, I do not see the need for it and I am sure hon. members agree with me on that point. The press release of December 4, 1979, which was over a year ago, stated, and I quote:

In the meantime, the cabinet ministers unanimously recommended that the corporation pursue its activities as usual until the findings of the Winnipeg meeting are known.

But the Winnipeg meeting, for reasons that we already know, never took place. Since then, the report was tabled and it is there for all to read. Therefore, unless there are new issues of which we are not aware, I do not see why we should force hon. members to consider correspondence between interested parties relating to a matter which, to all intents and purposes, concerns only one department and the corporation it is responsible for.

Mr. Speaker, all that has been said until now leads me to think that some undoubtedly well-meaning people wanted and still want to broaden the social role of the corporation. To be quite frank, it appears some would want to turn it into a social development agency. I shall reserve judgment on that proposal and on the purposes of those who hold that view. I think that the issue before the House today does not go that far; it concerns essentially the current role of the corporation which is that of a sales and marketing agency. The correspondence asked for does not concern us in any way. That is why, Mr.

Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation

Speaker, I do not think we should grant this request for papers and I ask my colleagues to vote against it.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): Under the provisions of Standing Order 48(2) which governs the debate on the motion now before the House, the time for the debate has now expired, with the exception that the Standing Order provides for the right of the minister to intervene for five minutes and the mover of the motion to intervene for five minutes, after which the Chair will put the question.

Hon. Roméo LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Speaker, when the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation was first formed in 1969 at the request of the provinces involved, the objectives of the new body were quite clear and straightforward; first, to market fish in an orderly manner; second, to promote international markets and increase inter-provincial and export trade in fish; and, third and most important, to increase returns to the fishermen in that one and a half million square mile territory. That was a formidable task and, I might say, it was generally achieved.

The first objective was met. The corporation has been able to market fish in an orderly manner by investing in capital assets such as fish packing stations and filleting, scaling, grading and freezing equipment so that the fish can be held until the best market is found for it.

On the second objective, international markets have been created. In the early years, some 80 per cent of the fish was sold in the United States. That percentage is now 61 per cent with some 23 per cent going to the European markets and 16 per cent to the Canadian market.

The third objective, and this is the most important, is the returns to fishermen. Before the corporation was formed, the freshwater fishermen were pretty well at the mercy of the buyers. They could not speak as one voice as they do now, and were compelled to accept what the companies were willing to offer them for their hard work. Frankly, it was pretty meagre at times. That situation has changed.

Before Christmas the corporation sent out the largest payments in its 11-year history to the fishermen under its jurisdiction, final payments for the year 1980 that total \$5.7 million shared among 3,500 fishermen from the prairie provinces, northwestern Ontario and the Northwest Territories. Those payments are a far cry from the small and unpredictable amounts they received for their fish prior to the establishment of the corporation.

These latest payments are only part of what has been received by the freshwater fishermen this year. If we compare the figures, we find that the figure for 1975-76 was \$10 million. In 1976-77 it was \$14 million. In 1977-78 it was \$15.3 million. In 1978-79 it was \$17.2 million. Then there was a phenomenal rise, to \$25.5 million in 1979-80.