

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

contributed to the pollution of the lake, thereby bringing about its closure. A little earlier the federal government had been buying fish from the fishermen and burning them in order to prevent the possibility of contaminated fish reaching the market. Once the lake had been closed, a crash program of compensation for the fishermen affected was instituted by the federal Department of Fisheries and the government of Manitoba, the federal department supplying \$1 million of the total bill of \$2 million. Later, when it became obvious that the problem would not be solved immediately and that something would have to be done before the winter, the government of Manitoba established a further program costing \$490,000, approached the federal Minister of Fisheries (Mr. Davis) for half the cost of this program and received the money.

Throughout this period the province had been working toward the establishment of income maintenance and job retraining programs which would provide a long-range solution to the problems of the fishermen affected. It was determined that this program—incidentally, it was described by federal spokesmen as imaginative—would cost somewhat in excess of \$2 million for the first year. Again, the government of Manitoba went to the Minister of Fisheries with the suggestion that the federal government should pay half. But on this occasion, for some reason, the minister was unable to make such a commitment on behalf of his department. He spoke of the need to consult the departments of Manpower, Indian Affairs and Northern Development, and so forth. As a result, the implementation of the plan was delayed and became snarled in red tape.

It is even now uncertain whether contributions from the various federal departments have amounted to half the costs incurred. To this day the government of Manitoba has not received a commitment from the federal government to be responsible for half the costs incurred in attempting to help these unfortunate fishermen adjust to circumstances which were not of their making. Surely, asking the federal government to bear half the cost of this program is an extremely modest request to make, given the fact that fisheries fall under federal jurisdiction. Yet no formal recognition of its responsibility has yet been forthcoming from the federal government.

What is to happen this winter, or next year? Are the problems of the fishermen to be dealt with again on an ad hoc basis? To which federal minister must the government of Manitoba go in order to obtain a decision in principle? Logic would suggest that the appropriate person would be the Minister of Fisheries since it is he who has been involved from the beginning. Even if the money does not ultimately come from the budget of his department, surely it is he who is best equipped to go to bat for the fishermen of Manitoba before his cabinet colleagues. Surely it is he who is best able to co-ordinate federal efforts. Surely the government of Manitoba should not be expected to go from door to door. But in his answer to my question of October 19, the minister said not so. This was his reply:

The short answer is my department is concerned with the development of an economic fishery and is not engaged in constructing an income support program for this segment of the Canadian population.

Who, then, is able to state definitely whether the federal government will accept some of the on-going financial responsibility for the problems encountered by the fisher-

men? The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau)? Last June I asked him that question directly in the House and he intimated he would have to consult the Minister of Fisheries who, as it happened, was not in the chamber at that time.

This evening I am asking for answers to three questions. First, is the federal government prepared to accept in principle and in fact responsibility for a share of the cost incurred in meeting the problems of the fishermen involved in this special case of pollution dislocation? Second, which department and which minister are responsible for co-ordinating federal efforts in this regard? Third, when will the federal government's decision with respect to assistance be made, when will it be conveyed to the province of Manitoba, and by whom?

Hon. Jack Davis (Minister of Fisheries): Mr. Speaker, we have a very difficult problem in Manitoba in respect of the fishery on Lake Winnipeg. Fishery matters, particularly conservation, and management of the fishery in that province have long been delegated to the province and are the direct responsibility of the provincial government.

Difficulties have been encountered recently in respect of income maintenance. The provincial government has developed several plans. It announces them and then asks the federal government to put up half the cost. The federal government, through its Department of the Environment, has been engaged in formulating development plans for the re-establishment of the fishery there. The fish resource was badly depleted in the 1950s and 1960s. It fell from a high of some seven million pounds, an all-time record, to half a million pounds in 1969—obviously a very poorly managed fishery.

Then the mercury problem came along. Winnipeg goldeye were fished out. Whitefish were in difficulty from a supply point of view before mercury struck. The federal Department of Fisheries, together with other provincial governments on the Prairies, had established a selling agency and was marketing all the fish from the Prairies. For a period while we were exploring the extent of the mercury problem, fish were bought and a percentage of the catch was destroyed.

Once the mercury problem indicated a closure, the federal Department of Fisheries endeavoured to develop new sources of livelihood for the fishermen. It has had a very active campaign, costing a total of \$450,000 during the last 12 months as a result of which 150 fishermen have been employed. Coarse fish, fish formerly rejected and not thought to be economic, now show considerable promise.

The provincial government continues to put forward programs for income maintenance for fishermen, many of whom have had their livelihoods seriously undermined by bad management in previous years. We are hopeful that most of Lake Winnipeg can be reopened for whitefish next year. However, it will be a very low level because of the very serious depletion of the lake. Also, we are hopeful that the coarse fish operation will develop to the point where it becomes commercial and provides considerable income for a number of fishermen. Other departments have been involved in the over-all program of rehabilitation, such as the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, and Manpower and Immigration. They have also assisted the provincial government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger): Order. I regret that the time allotted to the minister has expired.

Motion agreed to and the House adjourned at 10.31 p.m.