

Hon. Roméo LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries): Mr. Speaker, first, the hon. member seems to forget that the fishermen are already getting a considerable return from some \$30 million worth of investments which have created the technology required for the salmon enhancement program. The other point which the hon. member did not make in his question—and I thank him for giving me notice—is that not just fishermen but all sectors of the industry—commercial, sports fishermen and processors—are expected to carry part of the cost of what is a program not open to citizens generally but to a specific group.

It has been the policy all along that users in cases such as these—for example, airport licence fees, airport landing fees, the post office and other users of government services—should be requested to pay some of the cost.

● (1502)

Mr. Leggatt: Mr. Speaker, there is one group that the minister did not refer to in his answer who are apparently bearing no costs. These are the people who have polluted the rivers and dammed them. It is the CPR which has blocked the Fraser River. They apparently are not going to bear any of the cost of what is not essentially a salmon enhancement program but a salmon rehabilitation program. We are trying to bring those runs back to the condition that they were. Why is there not a program whereby those who have been responsible for degrading the fishing capacities of British Columbia are required to pay some of the cost of reinstating it?

Mr. LeBlanc (Westmorland-Kent): Mr. Speaker, one of the features we tried to design in this program is simplicity. I suspect if we were to try to do what the hon. member is suggesting, it would turn out not to be a simple matter at all. For example, how would he charge the cost of the landslide of 1913 which almost wiped out the Fraser River salmon runs?

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PRIVILEGE

MINISTERIAL RESPONSIBILITY—RULING BY MR. SPEAKER

Mr. Speaker: On Friday last, several requests were put to the Chair to seek or to explore the existence of unanimous consent for the purpose of extending some of the provisions of our Standing Orders and precedents of the House in order to permit either a statement by a minister, subject to questioning, provision of an opportunity for a minister to raise a question of privilege, or simply for clarification of the right to put questions to ministers.

Over the last couple of days I have ruled as clearly as possible on the reinforcement of our practices with respect to the limitation on questions which can be put to ministers, that is to say, respecting their own administrative responsibility at the present time. However, I did indicate I had some concern about the opportunity for the House to try to explore by one member that which would take unanimous consent by way of

an action on the part of another member, in this case particularly, a minister.

I indicated then that I thought it would be unwise to attempt to extend our practices in that way. Having examined the matter over the weekend, as I undertook to do, I have no reason to change that opinion. I am concerned that we really are not able to take, by way by point of order, in any regularized way an application for unanimous consent, but we do it in circumstances in which it seems that a member who wishes to do something for the benefit of the House feels constrained by the rules and seeks to ask the House to set those rules aside in order to permit him to do that.

If we were to extend that proposition to permit regular applications under points of order for unanimous consent by one member for another member to take such action, we would be inviting regular applications at three o'clock every day for an application for unanimous consent; for example, that the question period be extended indefinitely. We would be opening up the practice to tremendous flexibility. I say that particularly in view of the fact that in the way we have been using Standing Order 43, the Chair has tried to stay out of discussions or disputes as much as possible about the content of applications pursuant to Standing Order 43. In some cases they have been flagrant and I have not put the question to the House.

However, bearing in mind in the procedures we have arranged, because we take such applications at the beginning of the day and because they are, therefore, self-policing in terms of abuse of the rule, since they must stop in order to permit the start of the question period, it has given the Chair an opportunity to take a somewhat passive stance with regard to such applications. That adds a kind of flexibility to applications for unanimous consent pursuant to that Standing Order.

In view of the fact that members do enjoy the opportunity to put these kinds of propositions for perhaps setting aside the Standing Orders for a particular purpose or a particular day, I feel we ought to take a rather tight rein in respect of applications of other sorts for unanimous consent for the setting aside of our procedures, and that I ought to continue to confine the kinds of cases we have discussed to those where the initiative comes from the minister involved.

I want to remind the House that there is one outstanding question of privilege; that is the one related to the decision before the Supreme Court of Ontario. I have given a preliminary indication of the position that I felt the House was in with regard to any outside definition or circumscription of our privileges here. However, the Minister of Justice indicated it was his intention to make an intervention with regard to that matter. I am, therefore, holding that question of privilege open until such time as the Minister of Justice comes forward with that intervention, which I hope will be as soon as possible.

Hon. Ron Basford (Minister of Justice): Mr. Speaker, I have had an opportunity of meeting, since then, with the President of the Privy Council who is studying the matter. He will want to respond to the question of privilege as quickly as