

Private Members' Business

In addition to the above reasons, as this House is aware, Canada has pursued an initiative at the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development to help resolve the problems caused by overfishing of straddling stocks off our east coast. The Rio summit has issued a call for a UN conference to put in place agreed rules for the management and conservation of these stocks. While these rules will build on the existing provisions of the convention, this exercise is independent of its entry into force.

Canada already enjoys a good part of the benefits that could be accorded through ratification. Many of the elements of the convention are generally considered to be demonstrative of customary international law by much of the international community. This is particularly true of the parts of the convention dealing with fisheries.

In short, given all these reasons it is better for the present to continue to pursue the resolution of high-seas fisheries problems through the multilateral conference we have succeeded in placing on the international agenda. Through our continued active bilateral and international efforts that are beginning to pay off, consideration of ratification of the Law of the Sea Convention should await the results of the Secretary-General's consultation.

Therefore, this private member's motion is not in the best interest of either Canadian fisheries or Canada's over-all objectives in the Law of the Sea Convention.

Mrs. Marlene Catterall (Ottawa West): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in support of the motion of my colleague from Davenport that Canada should ratify the Law of the Sea. This convention, approved in late 1982, may be more important to Canada than to any other nation. We are a nation that defines itself by its relationship to the oceans. How often have we said over and over in this House "a nation from sea to sea to sea"? Yet, 10 years after the adoption of the convention on the Law of the Sea, Canada, as one of the countries that signed the convention, has still not ratified it. We have benefited from its provisions because other countries in the world are living by it, yet we have failed to take the step to commit ourselves to abide by it.

• (1710)

How we treat this convention becomes an even more important matter of principle now that we have signed two additional environmental conventions arising from the earth summit in Rio in June. We have signed two conventions on biodiversity and on climate change. Regrettably, to some extent, the public attention on those two issues, urgent and important as they are, has taken attention away from the state of our oceans and how important they are to the survival of life on this planet.

We agreed with Agenda 21 adopted at the UN earth summit in June. We have agreed with everything in there about protecting water bodies and the life in those bodies. We have agreed with their importance to humanity.

These issues and others are being increasingly recognized as areas where developed countries and developing countries have substantially different interests.

I have just returned from another follow-up conference of parliamentarians last week. We were looking very concretely at implementing the results of the earth summit in Rio. One strong issue is that the developing countries with so little and so much poverty feel we, the developed countries, the richest countries in the world are trying to put the burden of solving the environmental problems for the world on them when we have created the damage with our industrialization and consumerism.

It is ironic to look at the Law of the Sea Convention which Canada signed but has not yet ratified and note that, except for Iceland, the 53 countries that have ratified the Law of the Sea Convention and committed themselves to live by it are not the wealthy nations who are contaminating the soils, the air and the waters of the planet.

The seas of the world are vitally important to the survival of human life. This is not a matter we can put off for another decade. We know the dangers of contamination of coastal areas of the world and what that is doing to the oceans. We know its impact on food supplies for the developing countries particularly. Canadians have benefited from this. It has allowed us to extend our territorial zone. It has allowed us to claim 1.3 million additional square miles. It has allowed us to have more