

*Fisheries Development Act*

financial backing of the government to assist in the development of the fisheries industry we should have a Fisheries Development Act.

Members who were on the committee will recall that we broadened the program to include things other than the construction of fishing-vessels. Not very long before that we had expanded the act so that it would include ice-making plants, fish-chilling facilities, and so on. I am happy to report that there is some interest on the Pacific coast in that new aspect of the act. I think applications are in the course of development for construction of additional ice-making equipment and storage equipment, which may assist in having our fishery's catch landed, processed and delivered to the consumers' tables in better condition than has occasionally been the case in the past. That is all to the good, Mr. Speaker; but as some hon. members have pointed out, every so often we are asked to give our blessing to a proposal, in statutory form, for some great new program. Sometimes we accept proposals with considerable enthusiasm.

● (1520)

My recollection is that members representing Atlantic coast constituencies were enthusiastic about the announcement concerning the Fisheries Development Act. They said it had particular implications for their inshore and mid water fishermen. Yet today we heard reports which indicate that when we get right down to the place where the fishermen are, not very much has happened as yet and the fishermen are still living in hope of seeing some practical developments flow out of the legislation that we passed.

Now we are being asked to expand the Fisheries Development Act to cover programs to assist in modifying and converting existing fishing vessels. On the face of it, I have no hesitation at all in saying that I am prepared to support this concept in the legislation because it is necessary, if the minister is going to move, particularly on the Atlantic coast, to require higher construction standards for fishing vessels so that there be some enabling legislation whereby the regulations which he is so freely tossing out do not become increasingly impossible for the fishermen to live with.

So far as the Pacific coast is concerned, I have said that this program up until now has been of very little practical consequence. The simple explanation for this is that our really major fishery on the Pacific coast is the salmon fishing industry. From the outset of the small fishing vessel assistance program, the salmon fishing industry of British Columbia has been ruled ineligible to participate in it on the ground that we had too many salmon fishing vessels in the water and it would not be proper for the parliament of Canada to take steps to encourage the construction of more. It may be pertinent at this point to remind the House that, far from having special programs to assist in the construction of fishing vessels for the salmon industry, in effect we have had a program to buy out fishing vessels, something which is a complete reversal of the import of this legislation. We have had what is known as the buy-back program.

While on the one hand we have been putting money into grants to assist in the construction of fishing vessels, on

[Mr. Barnett.]

the other hand, in my part of the world primarily, we have been putting money into the pot to get fishing vessels out of the fishing industry. Both these developments may be necessary, and in some respects desirable—although the salmon fishermen of British Columbia would tell you that most of the money for the buy-back program comes out of their pockets. It is a sort of subsidy in reverse. In effect, they are subsidizing themselves to get fishermen out of the industry. This is worth mentioning in light of the experience that has just been recounted to us, where shortly after we passed legislation expanding the program for fishing vessel construction on the Atlantic coast the minister announced a freeze on the granting of moneys until a complete review was undertaken of the approach that was planned.

The fact is that every so often the Minister of Fisheries talks about great, unexploited fisheries which we are not utilizing to the full on a sustained yield basis. Then he suddenly discovers that with the kind of technology available to Canadian fishermen or, as is more frequently the case, available to foreign fishermen on the Atlantic coast, the fishery that has been underexploited becomes overexploited. I would agree that there must be some flexible application of various programs in the light of certain circumstances, but it is pretty difficult for individual fishermen to make rational plans to commit funds for the construction, improvement or conversion of a fishing vessel, funds which may be the principal investment of their lifetime, when they do not know from one week to the next whether a new edict will come out saying they can no longer participate in that particular fishery. For that reason alone, fishermen have every right to be concerned that when we pass a law there will be a realistic application of it. I hope that kind of application will be given to the present proposal to extend assistance with respect to the modification and conversion of fishing vessels.

One question in my mind that ought to be answered concerns whether this part of the program will be open to the west coast salmon industry. I have already indicated that west coast salmon fishing vessels have never been eligible for grants under this program. I am not basically quarrelling with that, but just as is the case on the east coast, so also on the west coast increasing emphasis is being placed upon having the type of vessels which will ensure that catches arrive at shore in good condition. This has a particular application in respect of our west coast salmon fishing industry. Some of the developments that have taken place recently require quite expensive installations in a modern salmon fishing vessel to preserve the quality of the fish and to increase the efficiency of the fishermen by installing proper refrigeration so he can stay out longer before returning to port with his catch.

That really is the only direct question in relation to the west coast fishery that comes to my mind. The questions which were asked by other hon. members from the Atlantic coast certainly deserve to be answered also. Perhaps I should also say that the questions raised by my colleagues, the hon. member for Meadow Lake (Mr. Nesdoly) and the hon. member for Northwest Territories (Mr. Firth) about the application of this program to the freshwater fisheries of Canada are also particularly relevant.