

Adjournment Debate

coast fishery, and, apparently as a result of no one being able to come up with any answers in that document, the government has appointed a task force headed by the second senior public servant, Mr. Michael Kirby.

What I asked the hon. minister, Mr. Speaker, was this. Why are there no representatives from the fishermen of the Atlantic coast on that particular task force? It was very interesting to hear the minister's reply. He said, this is not a Royal commission. He said he was satisfied that Mr. Kirby would hold discussions with many people. He even went on to say that he understood Mr. Kirby had approached some representatives of the fishermen and perhaps there was a possibility that some or one of them would serve on the task force.

However, Mr. Speaker, I want to advise the House that I and others have recently been on a visit to New Brunswick during which we spoke with many of the fishermen who are and will be involved in whatever deliberations Mr. Kirby undertakes. They made it very plain to us that they do not know what Mr. Kirby is doing. They do not know who is advising Mr. Kirby. They do not know who is on this task force which will decide what is to happen to them. They want representation, because without it, even with the best will in the world, Mr. Kirby will only get half of what he needs to know in order to present a report which could bail out the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, who has obviously bailed out of his responsibility concerning this situation.

● (2215)

It was extremely interesting to note that, while the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans told me there was no need for fishermen on the task force, only a few minutes later the hon. member for South West Nova (Miss Campbell) rose in her seat—she is a Liberal member—and picked up on the very point I had been raising because she understands that the fishermen in her riding are involved in the Atlantic coast fishery. She said, in part: "I suggest that there has to be someone there from the inshore fishery," and she suggested an advisory group. I would go beyond that suggestion and say that there must be someone from the offshore fishery there as well.

However, it was extraordinarily interesting that, within the compass of a few minutes of the time the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans battered down my request to have fishermen represented on the task force, he paid attention when a Liberal member got up, and said: "Just a minute," and the implication was that the hon. member for Vancouver South (Mr. Fraser) had a point. She then reinforced that point I was making and the minister thought it was very interesting. He then had a very different answer. In answer to the suggestion of the hon. member for South West Nova that, if there could not be someone there as part of the task force, there should at least be an advisory group representing the actual people who did the fishing, the minister said; "I think the hon. member's idea of an advisory committee is a perfectly valid one."

I would like an answer from whoever will answer for the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, unless, of course, someone

has been sent down here to answer for Mr. Kirby, because we are now in great doubt as to whether the minister or Mr. Kirby is in charge. We do not know just who is in charge. In any event, I would like to know whether the suggestion which I initiated, and which the hon. member for South West Nova supported, will be accepted. The hon. member is a well-respected hon. member, and she is well known to me. Will there be an advisory committee representing the people who actually do the fishing on the Atlantic coast?

I might also say that I wonder about the whole tenor of the Kirby task force. Why are no public hearings being held? Why is it that Mr. Kirby started off with the incredible bungle of saying: "I can reject the notion that provincial governments are the best judges of what is good for their constituents?" He then went on to insult the very people he will have to deal with by saying: "I am not a believer in the town council theory of government." This is the man we have sent down to the Atlantic coast to solve the problems of the fishermen.

Then again, I must point out to the House that this government has made an egregious mistake by announcing in advance that Mr. Kirby will be the deputy minister of fisheries. I ask Your Honour, and all hon. members, how will Mr. Kirby get the truth from departmental people if they know that they are talking to someone who holds their very future in his hands?

I have raised a number of points. I would like to have some answers. I certainly did not get them from the Minister of Fisheries the other day.

Mr. David Smith (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, when he announced the appointment of a special task force on the Atlantic fisheries just over a month ago, the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) said that in carrying out its work, the task force would consult with all those who have a role to play in the fishing industry. The task force is to recommend how to achieve and maintain a viable Atlantic fishing industry, with due consideration for the over-all economic and social development of Canada's eastern provinces.

● (2220)

The hon. member has attempted to create an issue over the fact that the task force does not plan to operate in the mould of a royal commission, with formal public hearings. I want to tell him that this small group of highly experienced individuals will ensure that every sector of the industry is heard from, that every aspect of the industry's fundamental problems is examined, and that the views of anyone who wishes to make a meaningful contribution to the search for long-term solutions will be most welcome, and will be given full consideration. You do not need a series of town hall meetings for that.

The Atlantic fishery includes a large number of interest groups: part-time fishermen, full-time fishermen, inshore fishermen, offshore fishermen, labour organizations, large processing companies, small processing companies, financial institutions, to enumerate only the obvious ones. As well, there are