

Government Orders

In effect you are saying to fishermen in a fleet: "You can only go out and fish x number of fish" when their capacity is great. They will tell you that maybe there are fewer fish out there. But all the studies they have been involved in with the department show that there is more fish there and that they should be allowed to fish. This was in the proposal which was submitted to the department over the last few months.

That proposal was for 25,000 pounds a week, per boat, regardless of using it or not if they did not go out, over 40 weeks. We are talking about 250 boats. We are not even talking maximums or an amount that the fishermen would have liked to have had. We are talking of a fishery in Georges that would allow them to go fish every week on Georges Bank where their American counterparts have been fishing all winter. They went one day last year to Georges, the area that has been so good to the fishery in the southern end of Nova Scotia.

I will tell hon. members the difficulty. A mesh size has been talked about. A mesh size allows the escapement of the little fish through the nets. I am sure that there have been at least five meetings a year for the last five years, if not more, where mesh size has been discussed with the department. The discussions started at a mesh size of 120 mm through to 140 mm. After many meetings a square mesh size of 130 mm was arrived at, a figure which the fishermen felt would allow them to start working with.

On Friday department officials said 140. They are never satisfied. They could not even meet the fishermen and tell them that face-to-face. They had to do it in a round-about way.

On Friday the department said to the fishermen: "You won't take a mixed bag". It is pretty hard to put the pollock over here, the cod over there and the haddock here and throw it back after it has been caught. That is a mixed bag. The department said: "You won't take a mixed bag. You'll take two-thirds of pollock and one-third of cod and haddock".

You tell me, Mr. Speaker, that when you are out fishing you can take two-thirds of this in your catch for the week, or whatever the allowance is? The department's attitude toward these people has become so incredible. Sure these people are sophisticated, but this is the only employment in the area. It is those fishermen who have kept the economy going.

We have had a year-round fishery in the past. There has been no sympathy from this government at all.

I would like to say one more thing about the proposal which came out on Friday. It was greeted with anger. The department was using the different sectors such as the longliners, the fish draggers and others to get at people. It came out clear yesterday that the department officials want to divide and see the offshore given total control of the area. They want to see the freezer factory ship given a licence in January 1991 again to come and fish within 20 miles where these people have traditionally fished.

The department is so numbed by having helped National Sea Products and Fishery Products International that it cannot see what it is doing to the inshore communities. It is very tragic when you think that these people have families and debts and yet they cannot go out and fish.

Over the last 11 months they have gone out seven weeks, and that includes the 20,000 pounds that they were allowed to catch over three weeks, which I talked about. It has become a tragedy.

The government will be responsible for what is going on there today. The fishermen are asking to go out and fish. The government should believe the fishermen when they say that there is more fish out there. They are not saying there is a lot of fish. The government should believe the fishermen and allow them to go out and fish. The government should allow them the dignity to earn their living in that area. This was the healthiest area in all of Nova Scotia. That should not be why it is being sacrificed.

• (1210)

I say to the government and my colleagues here in the House the tragedy that is happening down there today should not be happening. It is departmental officials who have closed the minds of the ministers involved in the east coast fishery. I do not think there is anyone there who would say that the fishermen have not tried to present a valid proposal on how they would fish for the rest of the year, as well as taking the caution on mesh size and other things into consideration.