

Private Members' Business

The motion we have before us today is a way for us to remind the government of that point, particularly in this instance when we are discussing Bill C-78, the government's environmental assessment legislation, which has been before us this week and which the government is anxious to have passed. It has many gaping holes in it, particularly as it has to do with international jurisdictions. This is an opportunity for us to remind the government that there is one very important trade and environmental issue that is just not being addressed.

I would like to thank the member once again for bringing forward this very sensible motion.

Mr. Scott Thorkelson (Edmonton—Strathcona): Mr. Speaker, today we are presented with the following motion:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should take action against the unfavourable GATT ruling in relation to British Columbia salmon and herring.

I would first like to suggest that this motion is even less relevant and even less appropriate today than it was on April 4, 1989 when it was first tabled. That is over a year and a half ago.

The government has already taken action to resolve our dispute with the United States on salmon and herring in a way which has fully protected our conservation and management interests for both salmon and herring.

Perhaps the hon. member was not able to see the recent CBC story on the tremendous run that has been occurring in British Columbia recently. They have had to hire extra workers there. As the hon. member for Athabasca has pointed out, less than 1 per cent of the salmon has been going to the U.S. to be processed.

• (1730)

I wish to recall the origins of the dispute with the U.S. government on salmon and herring. This issue arose from a petition filed with the United States trade representative in April 1986 by processors in the U.S. They complained that Canadian processors were buying significant quantities of unprocessed Alaskan salmon and herring, while U.S. processors were denied any access to such fish caught by Canadians in waters off our west coast.

It is absolutely essential to keep this fundamental fact in mind throughout any discussion of this issue, that is,

that Canadians were free to buy unprocessed American fish for processing in Canadian plants while Americans, under old regulations, against which the GATT subsequently ruled, were unable to buy any unprocessed Canadian salmon and herring caught off our Pacific coast.

In the past as much as 15 per cent of the salmon and 8 per cent of the herring processed in British Columbia was imported from Alaska.

In any case, the U.S. took this complaint against our former export prohibitions on unprocessed Pacific salmon and herring to the GATT. In November, 1987 a GATT panel presented its report, which found that our regulations were inconsistent with our obligations under GATT. Other GATT members supported the panel conclusions as valid and did not support the argument that Canada put forward in defence of our regulations. Faced with this reality, Canada agreed to the adoption of the panel report by the GATT in March, 1988.

This is the only ruling of the GATT against Canadian practices involving fish products. In her statement in the House of Commons on March 21, 1988 the Hon. Pat Carney, in her capacity as Minister for International Trade, announced our intention to remove the GATT inconsistent export prohibitions and bring forward new regulations to put in place a landing requirement for all Pacific salmon and herring.

Miss Carney explained that maintaining the *status quo* was not a viable option, since it would expose Canadian workers to the threat of U.S. retaliation, and that is no small threat.

In debating this motion, I think it would be useful to question what it would really mean to "take action against" a GATT ruling. In order to do this, we have to reflect on what the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade is, how it works and what Canada's place is in the GATT.

The GATT was established in 1948. It is the only multilateral agreement that lays down agreed rules for international trade. Over 85 per cent of world trade is covered by the GATT. It also functions as the principal international body concerned with negotiating the reduction of trade barriers and other measures which distort competition and concerns itself with international trade regulations.