

Adjournment Debate

three as exclusively transport harbours. All of these in this listing of 15 plus three that I have given are relatively small. In fact, in the earlier report by Dr. Tom How they were classified either as C or D harbours.

This raises the whole question of what value if any there is in dual departmental responsibility respecting relatively small harbours along the coast of British Columbia. I will confine my discussion to that question because I am not familiar with those on the Atlantic coast. In other words, if this transfer has in fact taken place, it seems to me that it has raised more questions than it has answered about the whole question, the long standing dilemma of small harbour administration. This mixed jurisdiction is something that I find very puzzling and I wonder how it will work to improve a situation which Dr. Tom How in his report in 1967 described as a rather disastrous one to say the least.

I must say, in conclusion, that not the least of the considerations that are raised by this transfer is the deep-rooted mistrust which the Minister of Fisheries (Mr. Davis) has engendered among commercial fishermen who are still the principal users of most of these small craft harbours and for whom the harbours were primarily built in the first place. The agile and scheming mind of that minister who moves in such a mysterious way his wonders to perform, in the light of all his actions about licencing, buy-back schemes and herring regulations—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. member, but the time allotted to him has expired.

Mr. William Rompkey (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, I will attempt to provide an answer to the hon. member's original question. The Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand) is responsible for the administration of federal harbours. The marine administration is established to administer commercial cargo shipping harbours within a network of marine transportation terminal and way facilities. Considerations governing the development and administration of these are based on user charges and cost recovery in so far as practicable in keeping with the national transportation policy as enunciated in the National Transportation Act.

Small craft harbour facilities are provided for the berthing of fishing and recreational craft and are accordingly not of basic interest to the ministry of transport as transportation facilities. There are some 2,700 harbours and facilities in Canada administered by the ministry of transport and of these 2,163 are recommended for transfer to the Department of the Environment. The Minister, in his dual capacity as Minister of the Environment and Minister of Fisheries, is responsible for the fisheries industry in Canada. This transfer of responsibility will enable the minister to deal more effectively with the orderly development of the fishing industry.

The decision on the transfer—I believe this was the hon. member's original question—was made by the cabinet on March 2, 1972. However, the transfer has not yet been completely implemented due to considerations involving implications for other government departments. It is anticipated that the matter will be resolved before April 1, 1973.

[Mr. Barnett.]

COMMUNICATIONS—BELL CANADA RATE INCREASE
APPLICATION—INQUIRY AS TO OPPOSITION BY
GOVERNMENT

Mr. Perrin Beatty (Wellington-Grey-Dufferin-Waterloo): Mr. Speaker, on January 18, as reported at page 430 of *Hansard*, I asked the Minister of Communications (Mr. Pelletier) the following question:

In light of the increased profit arising from last year's operations by Bell Canada, has the minister decided to make representations to the Canadian Transport Commission concerning their application for increases in rates?

Although the minister started to give me a reply to the question, he was ruled out of order by the Chair because the amount of time required by him to give the answer was longer than allotted. Primarily, my reason for asking for time in this adjournment debate was to give the minister time to explain the government's position on this very important matter. I do not want to take a great deal of time before the minister has an opportunity to do that, but I would like to make a few comments about the government's position on Bell before he speaks.

I think that each member of the House has had several complaints either about the quality of service provided by Bell or about the rates charged by Bell. At the present time the government is being asked to approve some very substantial rate increases for Bell which will directly or indirectly affect every Canadian family. Lord Thompson of Fleet once said that owning a television station is like having a licence to print money. In a very real sense having a monopoly, or quasi-monopoly in the communications industry is also like having a licence to print money because the use of these services is impossible to avoid by the average Canadian.

In a few minutes the minister will explain the government's unwillingness to appear before the Canadian Transport Commission by saying that it is due to the government's ability to overrule a decision by the CTC. In large part I agree with the minister's position. However, for the government to say this it must be prepared to take the extraordinary step of overruling the CTC if the decision it makes is not in the public interest.

There is another factor that must be considered by the minister and the government, and that is the role of the government as a customer of Bell Canada. For example, we are told that the government is the largest customer that Bell has in this country. As a customer whose bills are paid by the taxpayer, those of us who are here today have a responsibility to ensure that the taxpayer does not have to pay any more money than is absolutely necessary for these services. We also, as customers, have a responsibility to recognize the position which other customers are in, to make sure that their interests are also protected. In short, the government has a responsibility to ensure that the customers of Bell Canada do not have their voices go unheard.

What the government should do is make sure that counsel is freely available to customers of Bell so that their case can be put before the CTC. I will not personally take a position on the rate increase application because of lack of expertise and the facilities available to the government to examine Bell's submissions and operations. I would note a couple of things about Bell Canada, however.