

Freshwater Fish Marketing Act

I wish to speak in support of the motion because I think it is important that the Bill go to committee. I would like to outline why I think it should go to committee.

There are a number of freshwater fishermen in my riding along the Lesser Slave Lake area who depend on freshwater fish for their livelihoods. They give limited support to the Freshwater Fish Marketing Board which is located in Winnipeg. I say that they give limited support to it because, until approximately two years ago, freshwater fishermen in northern Alberta could not market their fish outside northern Alberta. They could not take their fish to Edmonton and market it there. They could not sell it to retail outlets or processors in Calgary, they could only sell it in northern Alberta. That gave them a very limited market.

To get pickerel, which is in high demand, whitefish and trout to market in Calgary, the fishermen had to ship the fish first to Winnipeg, and then the Freshwater Fish Marketing Board would ship the order back to Edmonton or Calgary. Indeed, in some cases, the board even sent orders to Grande Prairie, which is 150 kilometres away from the area where the fish was caught.

Mr. Benjamin: So provide them with more facilities.

Mr. Shields: The fishermen of my area have indicated very strongly their support for the Freshwater Fish Marketing Board for many of the reasons pointed out by my hon. friend from the socialist Party. However, he has failed to express the dissatisfaction that exists, maybe not with the freshwater fishermen from Lake Winnipegosis or Lake Winnipeg, but clearly with fishermen in northern Saskatchewan, northern Alberta and northern British Columbia. These fishermen do not have the same advantages as the freshwater fishermen in Manitoba.

My colleague interjected by asking, why should we not give them more facilities in the other parts of the province? I would agree with that, but how do we do that? Do we do that by saying that we will not even study this Bill? We all know that if the Bill goes to committee, we are capable of amending it. We are capable of addressing the concerns of the fishermen from Athabasca, Peace River, Atikameg, Fort Chipewyan, Lake Athabasca, Lesser Slave Lake and all of the little lakes in northern Alberta. Let us listen to what they have to say. I think they have some concerns that they perceive to be legitimate and there are ways that we can change the practices of the Freshwater Fish Marketing Board by removing its monopoly or retaining its monopoly but adding other services.

Fishermen from the Lesser Slave Lake area, particularly those from the West End Fishery Co-op, have been able to secure solid markets that the Freshwater Fish Marketing Board has not found in the past, even with its high paid salesmen who seek markets. The little freshwater fish co-op, called the West End Fishery Co-op, has found markets itself but has been denied access to those markets unless it they went through the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation in

Winnipeg. That small group of fishermen have found markets in the United States on their own. They turned the information on these markets over to the Freshwater Fish Marketing Board in Winnipeg in order to secure the markets. The Freshwater Fish Marketing Board has not, to date, secured those markets.

• (1750)

It seems to me that that is an indication of a complacent Crown corporation. The employees are not paid on the basis of expanding the market but only on the basis of their job descriptions. I am not denying for a moment that the Freshwater Fish Marketing Board in Winnipeg has done a good job for the fishermen on Lake Winnipeg, Lake Winnipegosis, and the lakes in northern Manitoba. However, it does not adequately serve the fishermen in northern Alberta, northern Saskatchewan, northern British Columbia, or the Territories. I am sure it is not by design of the corporation, but I am sure the corporation would be the first to admit that it has problems trying to control the flow of fish.

I am sure that there are an awful lot of people in this House who are prepared to vote against this legislation being referred to committee who do not understand the problems facing freshwater fishermen in Canada.

When I came to this House in 1980 one of the first things I tried to do—in which, I might add, I was successful—was to have freshwater fishermen included under the Unemployment Insurance Act. Until that time they were lumped in with the West Coast and East Coast fishermen, although their time of unemployment was absolutely counter to that of the East Coast and West Coast fishermen.

I want to give credit where credit is due. I took this problem to the then Minister of Employment and Immigration, the Member for Winnipeg—Fort Garry (Mr. Axworthy). We worked on the problem together and were able to accomplish something which was long overdue. Freshwater fishermen had for many years paid unemployment insurance premiums but could never avail themselves of the benefits of it.

I truly believe that this legislation should go to the committee for study. Let us learn from the fishermen in northern Alberta, northern British Columbia, and northern Saskatchewan the problems that they face.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I regret but the Hon. Member's time has expired. Is the House ready for the question?

Mr. Nickerson: Mr. Speaker, I wish to exercise my right of reply under Standing Order 61(2).

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I will allow the Hon. Member to make his last speech, which will talk out the Bill.

Mr. Nickerson: I understand, Sir, that before you recognize me, pursuant to Standing Order 61(2), to exercise the right of reply it is incumbent upon the Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 61(3), to give the necessary advice to the House in case