

Northwest Atlantic Fisheries

There was an abundance of fish not only on the banks but in other areas where they now have become relatively scarce, for instance, in the gulf of St. Lawrence areas. There were industries other than fishing which were based on marine life and which were of great importance in those days. There was a large fleet from the bay of Biscay that came across the Atlantic annually to whale in the gulf of St. Lawrence. The number of whales in the gulf of St. Lawrence has been greatly diminished. There are other forms of life that have been exterminated. In those early days the islands of the gulf of St. Lawrence were practically covered with what were known at that time as sea oxen or sea cows. There is still a place in the riding of the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Fisheries (Mr. MacNaught) that is called Sea Cow Pond, and it gets its name from the fact that two or three hundred years ago it was customary to hunt those sea cows in that area. That animal has been exterminated.

There was another type of sea cow that existed in Davis strait, and I believe they became extinct in 1768. Their existence was discovered only 30 years before, but they were the type of animal that was easy to hunt, and Russian fishing vessels came annually to hunt these sea cows in the Bering strait. They were exterminated in the course of 30 years. I point this out merely to illustrate how the original natural resources in this part of the Atlantic ocean have been reduced in the last 450 years. When Jacques Cartier arrived in the gulf of St. Lawrence in 1534 he had this to say when recording the details of his voyage:

About two leagues from Cape royall wee sounded and found 20 fadome water, and there is the greatest fishing of Cods that possible may be: for staying for our company, in lesse then an houre we tooke above an hundredth of them.

If one refers to historical references one will find many instances of an extreme abundance of fish and other forms of marine life 400 years ago in this area before they were exploited to any great extent. I make these remarks merely to point up the fact that this area has been exploited to a considerable extent and its possibilities have been reduced over the years by indiscriminate fishing and hunting of marine life.

As I have said already, there are various types of life that have been exterminated, and I refer particularly to two types of sea cow. Various types of birds, including penguins, which were very common on the islands of the gulf of St. Lawrence 400

years ago, have been wiped out. The number of fish has been reduced tremendously and the whole balance of nature has been upset.

Therefore, I suggest that it is most important that consideration be given to widening the scope of this convention to include forms of marine life other than fish. I have in mind especially whales and seals in the northern St. Lawrence and around Newfoundland. I think the protection of this form of life is very important.

I must say that I am tremendously encouraged by the indication that real progress will be made almost immediately in a co-operative, scientific study of the situation with a view to making regulations to be enforced by the various partners which will increase the potential of the resources in the northwest Atlantic.

Mr. J. Watson MacNaught (Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Fisheries): Mr. Speaker, in closing this debate I want to make just one or two references. More particularly I want to refer to the remarks of the hon. member for Saint John-Albert (Mr. Bell) and the hon. member for Esquimalt-Saanich (Mr. Pearkes) to the effect that this bill be referred to the standing committee on fisheries. I do not think that any useful purpose would be served by sending this bill to the standing committee.

The hon. member for Esquimalt-Saanich referred to the fact that the north Pacific fisheries convention was referred to the standing committee, but there is no analogy between the two cases. In the instance referred to by the hon. member the convention had not been ratified by the house and it was considered thoroughly by the committee before ratification took place. In the present instance the convention was approved by the house in July, 1950, and has been ratified by the ten other countries. I cannot see what purpose would be served by having it referred to the committee at this time.

I regret that something I said appears to have left confusion in the minds of the hon. member for Charlotte (Mr. Stuart) and the hon. member for Digby-Annapolis-Kings (Mr. Nowlan). What I intended to say was that the recommendation of the panel was that the mesh be standardized. Perhaps it would be more clear to hon. members if I read the recommendation, which was as follows:

That the contracting governments take appropriate action to prohibit the taking of haddock in sub-area 5 by persons under their jurisdiction with a trawl net having a mesh size less than four and one-half inches.

[Mr. MacLean.]