

National Harbours Board Act

my first speech to make it clear, not from what I say but from the authority of an organization for which I am sure everyone in this house has a very high regard, that at the time we took office the situation gave cause for real concern.

I would like to assure hon. members that the Canadian wheat board, which is the agency concerned with the marketing of Canadian grain, is being at least as aggressive as it was or as it has ever been in selling Canadian grain, and that it is getting at least as much support from this government as it did from this government's predecessors. I hope that with the support of all those concerned with the marketing of grain we shall be able to reverse the downward trend in grain exports that was well under way when we took office. With those few remarks, sir, I would like to turn to the substance of the—

Mr. Pascoe: Mr. Speaker, could I ask the minister a question, please?

Mr. Sharp: Certainly.

Mr. Pascoe: The minister said in his statement that exports are falling now. I recall that the former minister of agriculture said that it did not really matter what exports were like at the moment; what mattered was how they were at the end of the crop year. Could the minister indicate whether at the end of this crop year the marketings will be anywhere near the record of last year?

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Speaker, we will have had so little to do with the marketing of wheat in this crop year which, as the hon. member knows, ends on July 31, that in spite of the very best efforts we could make I doubt very much whether we could overcome the very serious problem that faced us when we took office. But we will be doing our best.

Now, sir, may I turn to the terms of the bill that is before us and make a few comments thereon. As the hon. member for Humboldt-Melfort-Tisdale (Mr. Rapp) explained to us, the purpose of this bill is to promote—if I may put it that way—the building of a public terminal elevator at Tisdale, Saskatchewan, with a minimum storage capacity of 5 million bushels. I feel that I cannot support this bill, for three main reasons. First, the building of a terminal elevator at Tisdale is not likely to increase exports of Canadian grain, as I shall explain in due course; second, the building of this elevator would probably have the result of increasing the cost of marketing Canadian grain; third, if one were to look at the grain situation in general I think he would come to the conclusion that there are

other places in Canada where elevators could be constructed with greater advantage to the movement of Canadian grain.

May I speak now, sir, first to the point as to whether this elevator is likely to increase the exports of grain from Canada. As the hon. member has pointed out, the purpose of this elevator would be to increase the volume of exports through the port of Churchill because this elevator would be located at the end of the Hudson bay railway. As he has acknowledged and as is well known, the port of Churchill is really one of the great models of efficiency in our grain handling situation and, if I may be permitted to say so, I think one of the reasons is that the elevator there was built by one of the greatest Canadians of all time, the late Right Hon. C. D. Howe. In a short period of approximately 10 weeks about 20 million bushels of grain have been exported recently from this port.

As the hon. member has said in his explanatory notes and as he has repeated again today, the reason for building an elevator at Tisdale would presumably be to clean wheat so that it could be moved through the port of Churchill with greater dispatch. This is one of the purposes. The theory is that this would mean a greater volume of wheat moving through the port. However, Mr. Speaker, this reasoning is based on the assumption that the volume of wheat moved through Churchill depends entirely on actions taken within Canada, that it is in Canada that the impediments, such as they are, exist.

As the hon. member is aware, export sales out of Churchill have been running at around 20 million bushels annually for the past several years. This is all shipped out during August, September and October, and this period immediately follows the harvest period in the United Kingdom and Europe where our present market for Churchill grain exists. As a result storage facilities in those countries are usually filled with their domestic grain at that time. There is, therefore, a definite limit to the volume of wheat that can be absorbed by the European market during the time that it is convenient to ship wheat from Churchill. The only exception would be if storage facilities were built in Europe to store Churchill grain, and this would be very expensive. According to the Canadian wheat board the volume of exports out of Churchill is at or near its maximum level until such time as new outlets can be found for Churchill wheat.

The second reason that I find myself doubtful about the wisdom of building this elevator at Tisdale at the present time is that I think, as I said before, that it would tend to increase the over-all cost of marketing Canadian wheat. During the busiest part of the