

*Supply—Fisheries*

come into the Fraser they have stopped feeding. They are feeding off their own bodies and the quality of the fish is going down very rapidly. They become very ugly fish with splotches of colour showing all over their bodies. They get to the spawning ground, spawn and then die.

Since we have had a fishery in British Columbia the problem has been how much fishing we should allow on the Fraser river. In the old days there was no restriction at all. Fishermen fished as far up the river as their boats would go, to Sumas, almost seventy miles up the river. The quality was poor. The fish were then dying. They were on their way to perform their last function. In the early days the canneries would not accept either pinks or chums caught in the river. They would not accept any sockeye which had any colour on it at all.

In 1905, because of this condition, a royal commission was appointed to investigate the problem of fishing on the river and it sat for two years. When the fish are in there they are at the most valuable period to Canada of their whole cycle. These are the little fingerlings that went to sea, survived all the hazards of their years of life at sea, fought their way back through all their enemies around Vancouver island, avoided all the nets in the river and headed up to their spawning ground. These are the ones which are going to perpetuate the species. They are in a narrow stretch of the river and in a most vulnerable position to be caught with nets right down to the bottom and right across the river.

Before the royal commission which conducted this investigation from 1905 to 1907 the scientists recommended that the fishing be closed at Westminster on the grounds of both quality and conservation, but other witnesses before the commission presented the argument on compassionate grounds that above Westminster there were settlers clearing land of timber, that these fish were food for them and that they could sell clean fish to the canneries. As a concession the royal commission said that fishermen above the bridge who lived there could fish in that stretch and only in that stretch.

In 1905 there were forty-two of them. In 1912 there were only seventy. They were still settlers. In 1922 there were 112 and last year there were 611 fishermen in this thirty miles of river going after these salmon heading to their spawning ground. The quality is poor. There are more fishermen there today than there were in the days when the royal commission investigated conditions in 1905. All connection with clearing land has gone. These are fishermen who never go to sea,

[Mr. Sinclair.]

who fish two or three days a week for a period of three or four months in that narrow stretch of river and expect to make a living. Our other fishermen range the whole coast from Oregon to Alaska. They fish the year round. They catch the salmon at sea when it is in first class shape. I would ask those hon. members who are farmers what they would think of a farmer who did not harvest all his wheat at the proper harvest time but waited until the fall when the wheat was frost killed to harvest it. That is just about what we are doing with our salmon when we allow salmon, which are first class salmon in the sea, to be caught up the river when the process of deterioration has started.

It is for that reason that our scientists and officers recommended, with respect to these slow moving fish, the pinks and the chums, that fishing above the bridge be stopped in the future. I announced to the fishermen at the union meeting in Vancouver that we would stop that fishery on September 16. That would mean they would still get spring fishing and summer fishing for sockeye salmon which go much farther up the river and are in better shape, but not for the pinks and the chums. Naturally a great protest was raised by the people who were affected. They said that they could not go to sea, that they did not have the gear or the boats. I met the union, I met the gill netters, I met the local mayors and reeves and pointed out that we were interested in quality and conservation. When I met them I promised to look at the question again. Their main point was that this might be the right thing to do but I was doing it too quickly, that I should take it in steps.

Since I came back to Ottawa we have discussed the matter again with our research people and our officers, and it is probably right that we are doing it in a little too big a sweep. Therefore we have changed the closing date this year from September 16 to three weeks later, October 8. They will have the tail end of the sockeye and the first of the pinks and the chums. The hon. member for New Westminster applauds. I want to tell the committee that next year it will be September 30 and the year after it will be September 15 because it is felt that in the interests of quality and conservation we must close this fishery. But because of the reasons put forward by these people for a little more gradual closing off, we have agreed to make that change.

There is one other point which was raised by the hon. member for New Westminster, the question of whether we are going to have fish or power in British Columbia. The Columbia river down south was as great a