

Small Businesses Loans Act

● (1340)

I leave Hon. Members with this suggestion. I would certainly not pass either one of these Bills with just a flick of the wrist. I would consider an extended debate on each one of these clauses.

Mr. Ray Skelly (Comox—Powell River): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to comment on Bill C-63. I share some of the concerns expressed by my friends and colleagues today. It is unfortunate that we have only a few minutes on the last sitting day to discuss an issue as important as small business in Canada.

The purpose of the Bill is to cover the fishing industry under the Small Businesses Loans Act and replace the Fisheries Improvement Loans Program. As has been expressed by previous speakers, this is a wrong-headed approach to the problem fishermen face in raising capital for vessel and other equipment acquisition and improvement. The improvement loan program has been quite suitable over the years. I suppose these changes reflect government philosophy, which is to make it more difficult for people to acquire capital. The philosophy is that if you have the money, you can participate in resource extraction. If you do not, even though you may have years of experience in the industry, you cannot participate. It is interesting that at the same time the Government is providing this borrowing mechanism for the fishing industry, it is creating a situation which is leading to chaos. Fishermen will have great difficulty in making an adequate living, much less repaying existing loans. Some of those difficulties were mentioned by my colleague, the Hon. Member for Cowichan—Malahat—The Islands (Mr. Manly), as well as other members in the Official Opposition.

Some years ago we had a royal commission studying the West Coast fishery headed by Peter Pearse. That commission developed a plan which would have removed most fishermen from the industry. It would have given the fishery to a limited number of wealthy individuals. The plan put forward by the commission indicated that the fishing industry was chaotic. Too many boats were chasing too few fish. Limited access was the idea. Of course that makes it hard to make a living. I think that over the years the people involved hoped the Conservative Government would make a commitment that the Liberals never would make, that the Pearse plan would be stopped. That has not happened. Instead we see an acceleration, which is driving small fishermen out of the business and weakening the coastal communities concerned because they are being cut off from the industry.

It is interesting to note where the Government has taken this industry. First we have the development of plans which work against fishermen. On the West Coast the Minister instituted a new consultative body called the Pacific Region Advisory Committee. That replaced the previous ministerial advisory committee. It has now become a political mechanism. If you support the right political Party, you can give advice to the Minister. Instead of representing the people who fish off the

West Coast of Canada on a proportionate basis, you have a committee composed of a few wise persons. I use the term "wise" advisedly. In some quarters a wise Conservative might be viewed as a contradiction in terms. Nevertheless, this committee is highly politicized and does not represent those who fish off the West Coast. It certainly does not represent them with any weight.

The unfortunate part of all this is that there will be little if any consistency in the advice the committee gives to the Minister to develop fishing plans. Neither will there be continuity. After the next election the Conservative Government will no longer exist and another committee will replace the present one. We will then lose any kind of continuity, something that is absolutely critical when you are dealing with fishing cycles of up to four years and conservation cycles of up to 20 years. The industry is being made more unstable at the advisory level.

In addition, when local and regional advisory committees are appointed they make recommendations to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. Instead of following the advice of those who have the knowledge and experience, people who have done this for generations, the Department chooses to ignore the advice and impose its own decisions. Those decisions are often politically motivated, and I will give one example.

There is a sports fishing corridor in Rivers Inlet. That corridor was opposed by the Central Coast Regional Advisory Committee. Yet the Minister chose to go ahead. Unfortunately, that sets a precedent for other coastal areas and that is a bad precedent contrary to the advice given. The whole business of planning and operations in the fishing industry has been dislocated, to say the least, by the Government.

The next problem in the industry is the whole business of allocation. It is a very serious matter. I understand the Minister stood up before the British Columbia Wildlife Federation and indicated he was prepared to turn two species of salmon over to the sports fishing group, the coho and the chinook. That is completely unacceptable. Traditionally the spring and coho salmon have been fished by both sports fishermen and commercial fishermen and native people. There is no doubt that with proper management and proper enhancement those species can be available for all. Any Minister who decides to court favour with one small group of commercially oriented sports fishermen is in serious political trouble. Such a view of allocation based on political affiliation and on a small group making a loud noise will lead to serious political consequences.

● (1350)

With regard to small craft harbours, fishermen who make small business loans are being bashed into the ground through additional costs and impairments in the fishing industry. How can you make your payments on a loan if you cannot fish? The Government is talking about developing a landing tax. Peter Pearse proposed that in order to get rid of small fishermen you