

Inquiries of the Ministry

There are two exceptions to the prohibition; first to enable the Indian and Eskimo people to hunt seals for food and clothing, and second to allow the Canadian government to engage in research work.

Motion agreed to and bill read the first time.

FISHERIES**REQUEST FOR LEGISLATION TO PROHIBIT SEAL HUNTING**

On the orders of the day:

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, as private members' bills do not often receive early attention, or any attention at all, I should like to address the following question to the Minister of Fisheries.

Now that the sealing season is concluded and the reports of the S.P.C.A. officials and other observers make it clear that cruelties are far from ended, and also that one of the department's senior officials was forcibly thrown off a sealing ship when endeavouring to enforce government regulations, would the minister inform the house whether he is now willing to bring before us the necessary legislation to put an end to this inhumane practice?

Hon. H.-J. Robichaud (Minister of Fisheries): Mr. Speaker, first of all I wish to advise the right hon. gentleman that I have received a report from five representatives of S.P.C.A. societies who witnessed the seal hunt this year. They have unanimously agreed and reported that the evidence of cruelty was minimal, that there was a general improvement in the operation, that the level of the enforcement of regulations by officials of the Department of Fisheries was greatly increased, and that compliance with the regulations was generally satisfactory in the circumstances.

With regard to the event the hon. member has mentioned, when a senior official of the department was ordered off a ship, may I say that this senior officer suspended the licences of most of the crew members of the ship for 24 hours. As soon as the captain ordered him to leave the ship he immediately contacted his headquarters in Halifax, which got in touch at once with the owner of the ship. In turn the owner telephoned the captain and told him that unless the regulations of the Department of Fisheries were fully carried out the captain would be immediately replaced and the licence of the ship would be cancelled.

[Mr. Howard.]

Mr. Diefenbaker: I should like to ask the minister whether it is a fact that he received a telegram from the New Brunswick S.P.C.A. to the effect that autopsies performed on baby seals by Dr. Elizabeth Simpson "indicate a large proportion of baby seals still being skinned before death in unsupervised killings". I should also like to ask the minister, in view of the fact that the income from this operation is so small, whether the time has not come, in the interests of humanitarian considerations, to end this practice regardless of the improvement this year or the year before, which incidentally was pointed out by the minister in identical terms last year.

Mr. Robichaud: Mr. Speaker, I did receive such a telegram from Dr. Kinloch, vice president of the New Brunswick S.P.C.A. I replied immediately to Dr. Kinloch that the statement in his telegram was not according to the facts. There were two veterinarians, representatives of the S.P.C.A., who witnessed the operation and they have by their own reports concluded that the report made by Dr. Simpson and a companion, Mr. Brian Davies, was not accurate or according to the facts.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, may I come back to the major question I asked, which was this. In view of all the circumstances and the fact that 50,000 is the total number that are being killed, having regard to the serious feeling on the part of the people generally toward the inhumanity of this operation and the smallness of the income from it derived by Canadians, does the minister not feel that the time has come to end this practice?

Mr. Robichaud: Mr. Speaker, I wish again to advise the right hon. gentleman that the quota of 50,000 is the number being applied both to sealers and to those operating from aircraft. Furthermore, an additional number of seals are killed by landsmen, by fishermen who need the revenue at this time of year in order to provide a livelihood to care for their families. In view of the interest that is being shown by the right hon. gentleman may I remind him that it might be appropriate to go back to his own files between the years 1960 and 1962 and look at the letters which he himself sent to S.P.C.A. officials when he was responsible for the government.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think we are now getting into a debate between the Leader of the Opposition and the Minister of Fisheries. I suggest that perhaps we should go on to another question.