

Government Orders

• (1730)

Mr. Ross Belsher (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise in this House and to speak to the bill presently before us, that is an act governing the port warden of the port of Montreal and the act governing the port warden of the port of Quebec.

The goal of the bill is to increase the efficiency of the administration of the port wardens by the Board of Trade of Montreal and la Chambre de Commerce de Quebec. It will also remove archaic features of the legislation, which date back to 1882 for the port of Montreal and 1871 for the port of Quebec.

I should point out, Mr. Speaker, that the port wardens at the port of Montreal and the port of Quebec are unique in Canada. Their individual legislation and responsibilities which link them to the Board of Trade of Montreal and la Chambre de Commerce de Quebec, pre-date Confederation.

The port wardens fulfil an important role. Their duties include inspecting all cargoes of grain, mineral concentrates, timber stored on deck and explosives. They also ensure that a ship meets the necessary safety requirements and is loaded in accordance with Canadian safety regulations.

The Board of Trade of Montreal and la Chambre de Commerce de Quebec are empowered under their respective legislations of 1881 and 1871 to establish tariffs of fees for these services.

The legislation requires that the tariffs of fees cover the costs of the port wardens' offices and that the moneys collected may only be used for the purposes of these offices. These tariffs of fees currently require approval by the Governor in Council before coming into force, and in past years have remained in force for long periods of time.

However, in today's fast-moving maritime commercial world and with rapidly fluctuating costs, the Board of Trade and la Chambre de Commerce now find it necessary to adjust the tariffs of fees, often at short notice, in order to meet the costs of the port wardens' offices for providing their services to the shipping industry.

Forecasting ship demands, and hence forecasting the revenues necessary to cover the costs of the port war-

dens' services is difficult. Recognizing the longer time-frame required for government approvals, it is the government's intention to remove from the legislation the requirement for Governor in Council approval. Safeguards for government and the shipping industry to ensure the high level of service at appropriate costs will be maintained.

The primary objective of the bill, therefore, is to provide the Board of Trade and la Chambre de Commerce with the authority to approve tariffs of fees and put these into effect. We are confident that greater efficiency will be achieved in the administration of the offices of the port wardens at Montreal and Quebec and continued excellent service to the shipping industry will be assured.

The federal government will retain its over-all responsibility for appointing the port wardens, and auditing the financial management of their offices. The shipping industry and the Canadian Coast Guard will continue to have representation on technical committees of the Board of Trade and Chambre de Commerce responsible for the duties of the port wardens, and recommending tariffs of fees. Users will be consulted and informed of tariffs of fees changes by the Board of Trade and la Chambre de Commerce through the process of pre-publication in the *Canada Gazette* and local newspapers.

Before establishing tariffs of fees, la Chambre de Commerce and the Board of Trade presently undertake consultations with users of the ports on the fairness of these fees in relation to the value of the service and the responsibility vested in the port wardens for safety of the ships, cargo and crew. There is general satisfaction among users regarding the quality and nature of the service provided by the port wardens at these harbours. This same effective and harmonious relationship will continue.

Mr. Speaker, the second objective of this bill is essentially a housekeeping amendment. It will remove archaic features of the original legislation that fixed payments and charges for services of the ports wardens in the legislation itself. These charges were appropriate many years ago but are no longer valid in meeting present day costs of doing business. For example, the legislation required the payment of one-quarter of a cent per head of livestock and even a fee not exceeding two cents per barrel on all ashes shipped from the port.