

Government Orders

The great promises of the conservative government have not been achieved and the whole Montreal transportation industry is paying the price.

• (1350)

[*English*]

Mr. Fred J. Mifflin (Bonavista—Trinity—Conception): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity to continue what I was saying in my comments to the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell.

In the few moments that are left to me I want to reiterate the importance of the main resource, that is the fishing industry, to Newfoundland and, indeed, to my riding; its impact and how it relates to the transfer payments. Life has been difficult for us because of the federal government's fiscal freeze.

Historically Newfoundland and Labrador have been subject to economic forces that unfortunately have been beyond our control. Our traditional dependence on the resource-based export industries means that external forces have a tremendous impact on the province and our economy.

If I put it another way, Newfoundland has become excessively dependent on fiscal transfers from the Government of Canada because of the limited development and the lack of diversification that is possible in the economy. An increase or decrease, depending on the over-all economic performance of the Canadian economy and indeed the philosophical approach the federal government shows with respect to regional disparity, has a driving and an overriding effect on Newfoundlanders and their economic way of life.

Relevant to our discussion this morning and this afternoon, in the past few years and coincident with the declining economic performance in Canada, the future of the fishery, which is the economic backbone of our province and indeed, of most of Atlantic Canada, has been seriously eroded.

Anyone who sat in this House over the last two and a half years would not be surprised to hear that. I want to give some indication of how much.

Over the past few years there has been progressively greater quota reductions, and the result is that the groundfish landings have declined by over 60,000 tonnes in the past few years. That is a tremendous decrease. A

major contributor to the decline of our groundfish continues to be foreign overfishing inside and outside the 200-mile economic zone. The government of the day, whether it is Liberal, whether it is Conservative, whatever it is, that government has to become aware of the necessity to take some Draconian measures to restore the fishing industry to a reasonable level, like it was before.

I could go on for a long time, but I want to make the point that we must be the only country in the world that allows foreigners to harvest the very national resource on which the living of our region and that of the country depends.

I have to refer to the days eight years ago when people talked about a 400,000 tonne total allowable catch. That is the measure of what we do in Newfoundland. TAC it is called, 400,000. We are looking at less than 200,000 today. This is a very simple point. It can be confused with all kinds of caveats and all kinds of perturbations and all kinds of arguments. The fact remains that the foreign overfishing that has taken place inside the 200-mile limit, which is condoned and indeed encouraged by the Government of Canada, is the same level of foreign fishing that took place when the total allowable catch was twice what it is now.

You do not need a Ph.D. in fishing resource industry to understand that there is something dramatically wrong with that. There will be a price to pay. If we cut down the foreign fishing inside the 200-mile limit we may suffer some loss of trade. That trade-off has to be made and it has to be made soon. That is probably the most important thing that we can achieve in my mind, as far as the fishing industry is concerned, in the next couple of years until this Parliament completes.

The second problem is foreign overfishing outside the 200-mile limit. I am personally, and I know a lot of my colleagues are and I believe some members on the other side, in favour of extending Canadian jurisdiction to the nose and the tail of the bank, which is outside the 200-mile limit, but it gives Canada control of a resource that we own. How does a fish know if it is inside or outside the 200-mile limit? Can it be done? They said that we could not increase the three-mile limit to twelve miles. It was done. They said that we could not increase the 12-mile limit to a 200-mile limit. It was done.