

Oral Questions

The Canadian Wheat Board has always maintained and tried to ship wheat at the preferred customer location destination and we will continue to do that. I would expect this was likely raised with Mr. Yeltsin this morning. The main thing is that we maintain those sales and keep the sales moving to Russia.

There are no plans to change anything at the port of Churchill. We hope there will be an opportunity for some of those grain products to go through that port. That is a decision the Canadian Wheat Board and the buyer will have to make.

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EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Brian Tobin (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte): Madam Speaker, my question is for the minister of employment.

On Tuesday in St. Anthony, Newfoundland, a thousand fishermen and plant workers organized a demonstration calling upon the government to pay attention to the fact that they have been without income since May 15 and asking it for assistance.

On Wednesday in the House the Prime Minister committed his government to bring in a program of short-term, medium-term, and long-term assistance. We applaud that on this side of the House.

Given that there are only a couple of House sitting days left and given that no information has yet been communicated to fishermen and to plant workers who are looking at a moratorium on the fishery for the first time in 500 years, can the minister, through the House, tell the people of Newfoundland and Labrador what proposals and programs he will be bringing forward to provide immediate short-term assistance for those who have been without income for the last five or six weeks?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Madam Speaker, as the Prime Minister indicated on June 17 in this House, the government is well aware of the situation in Newfoundland and Labrador, for that matter, all of Atlantic Canada and the state of the fishery.

He indicated then that the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans who is in Newfoundland today would be coming back with proposals for the government to consider.

I would like to be able to inform the hon. member of more details today but it is not possible. I would not want him to leave the impression that because the House will adjourn it will be impossible for the government to take the necessary action. If it is not possible to make an announcement or state the government's intention before the House rises, the government will still have the ability to do that after and as soon as possible.

• (1440)

Mr. Brian Tobin (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte): A supplementary, Madam Speaker.

More than 60 members of Parliament from a variety of political parties, including independent members, have officially asked for a proper emergency debate on this issue.

For the first time in 500 years we are talking about a formal moratorium, a close down of an industry that is the backbone of the economy of Newfoundland and Labrador and certainly in similar straits in other parts of Atlantic Canada.

Will the minister tell the House today that before the House adjourns for the summer recess he, as minister of employment, together with the minister of fisheries, is prepared to come before Parliament and through Parliament tell the people of Atlantic Canada what their program will be? What measures are going to be introduced to ensure that people are able to maintain the basics of life and certainly the dignity to exist during the interim period until those cod stocks are rebuilt?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, the government has already had occasion to act to protect the fishing families in Newfoundland and Labrador and in all of Atlantic Canada.

The Prime Minister indicated quite clearly that we were looking at options and ways of trying to address their concerns. He is talking about a moratorium that has not been announced. The Minister of Fisheries and Oceans is there consulting with stakeholders in Newfoundland and Labrador and with the provincial governments. As soon as the government is capable of making known how we can contribute to help those people in Newfoundland and Labrador, we will.