

cattle producers, or, alternatively, whether the government is proposing to announce payments to all those who believe they would be eligible for them?

**Hon. H. A. Olson (Minister of State for Economic Development):** Honourable senators, we do not, of course, comment on whether or not there is validity to this kind of action being taken by anyone. I can say, however, that payments were made on the basis of the criteria set out for eligibility, and this includes a very high percentage of the number of people claiming distress arising from the drought in 1980.

There are always cases along the border of the geographical area, or, indeed, along the border, if you like, of the criteria, which require examination by a review committee. That has been done, and those files are now in the hands of the departments responsible—namely, the Department of Regional Economic Expansion, and the Department of Agriculture. Perhaps some modification has to be made to the rules in order to give a little more flexibility in these borderline cases.

I will try to obtain a report as to how many cases are left; but quite obviously we want to be fair, just and reasonable, and, as far as possible, to apply the criteria uniformly. My friend should realize, though, that there will always be problems in this kind of matter because of where you go from what is clearly a case within the qualifications to a case that is just slightly to one side. We want to be fair in this, too, but unfortunately there may be circumstances in which some rough justice has to be applied. We do want to try to be fair, though.

**Senator Nurgitz:** I wonder if the minister can assure us that every person clearly within the guidelines established by the government has been paid, and, consequently, that the statements being made by the Western Canada Cow-Calf Association are therefore totally in error, since there is a suggestion by that group that people within the guidelines have not been paid.

● (1410)

**Senator Olson:** Honourable senators know that anyone clearly within the guidelines has been paid. There are some people who thought they might be within the guidelines, but when the review board or the assessors looked over the applications perhaps they did not qualify for one reason or another. As my honourable friend knows, one of the criteria had to do with more than 50 per cent of normal precipitation falling during a certain period. The other had to do with harvesting more than 80 per cent of a normal crop during the period, which has been adjusted two or three percentage points—in fact, I think four percentage points—to try to accommodate that.

Therefore, I do not think there is anyone left who has not been paid who was clearly within the guidelines. However, there may be a few more who equally qualify but who, as he said, did not fall clearly within the guidelines as set out in the original application and the criteria related to it.

**Hon. Duff Roblin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition):** May I ask a supplementary question of the minister? Is it true that

there are some 3,000 cases now under review or appeal? If so, who is responsible for deciding those cases?

**Senator Olson:** Honourable senators, I am not sure of the exact number of cases, but I would not be surprised if that were the number. The last time it was reported to me, I believe something like 22,000 applicants had been paid. There may be 2,000 or 3,000 cases outstanding, a figure generally in that area. I suppose that the minister will have to look at some modification, if we find that there are criteria which are disqualifying people who ought to be eligible, and make some change in those rules so that we can give instructions, if I may use that term, to Treasury Board to authorize payment.

**Senator Roblin:** I wonder if I could ask the minister to report to us, at his convenience, as to when these matters will be dealt with. After all, it is a long time since the event which concerns us occurred. The Minister of Agriculture—who, incidentally, left his blind calf back in Saskatchewan, I believe; it did not reach Ottawa—is reported to have admitted that the matter has been handled somewhat poorly by the federal government. I do not know whether or not my honourable friend would care to agree with that opinion, if it is correctly ascribed to the minister, as I think it is. However, I should like to know from him when these decisions will be made. Will he please provide us with a statement of the terms of reference under which these awards are made? Perhaps he could let us know how much money has been paid out.

**Senator Olson:** I can obtain some of those figures. I will give an undertaking now to do so. However, perhaps this is one case where I could publicly disagree with the Minister of Agriculture, if it is correct that he said the government has handled this matter somewhat poorly. I think the government did a magnificent job of handling the whole situation, which is the usual kind of delivery system we expect.

**Hon. Royce Frith (Deputy Leader of the Government):** That is Senator Flynn's favourite phrase.

**Hon. Jacques Flynn (Leader of the Opposition):** A magnificent job!

**Senator Olson:** I know that we were breaking new ground along the way, what with bringing in new personnel in an effort to respond to a very difficult situation. As a matter of fact—and Senator Roblin will appreciate this—when the drought was completely assessed in western Canada, some areas were found to be fairly clearly defined by weather patterns. However, many of the areas where some of these payments were made looked like a polka-dot arrangement, with regard to precipitation, because of some heavy showers that relieved the drought situation. That factor makes it particularly difficult to set down uniform criteria. I think that under all the circumstances it was handled rather well.

**Senator Nurgitz:** I have one final supplementary on that very topic. Would the minister also confirm for us whether, of the many cases heard by the government-established appeal board, there were roughly 3,000 cases in which the appeal board recommended payment on which no payment has been made to date?