

I want to ask the minister if he in any way consulted the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development before the other minister announced his program, and, in particular, is the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans aware of the fact that members of the Indian Fisheries Assistance Board, a board which still sits in consideration of programs in support of native fishermen, were not even consulted by the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development before he announced this \$4.2 million emergency relief program?

Mr. LeBlanc: Madam Speaker, I know there were conversations between officials of my department and my colleague, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, but I certainly would have supported and do support assistance to native fishermen who, in fact, have seen their participation in the west coast fishery somewhat eroded in the last couple of years. It is to prevent this erosion of the licences held by Indian fishermen that I have changed the policy and that I do not allow back payment by non-Indian fishermen in order that they may assume holding of licences.

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[Translation]

ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

ACID RAIN—DATE OF MINISTER'S MEETING WITH UNITED STATES COUNTERPART

Mr. Pierre Gimaiel (Lac-Saint-Jean): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister of State for Science and Technology and Minister of the Environment.

In view of that statement made yesterday by the American Secretary of State designate, General Alexander Haig, during the Senate confirmation hearings, can the minister confirm whether he will arrange to meet with his American counterpart as soon as he is in office in order to inform him of Canada's concerns with regard to the action which should be taken in order to eradicate, as soon as possible, acid rain pollution from the United States?

Hon. John Roberts (Minister of State for Science and Technology and Minister of the Environment): Madam Speaker, I want to assure the hon. member that I do intend to arrange a meeting as soon as possible with my American counterpart in order to discuss joint problems such as acid rain. However, Mr. Reagan has not yet indicated who will head the Environmental Protection Agency and I do not think I can meet with my counterpart, the Minister of the Interior, until Congress has approved that choice. It is therefore somewhat difficult for me, at this stage, to indicate precisely when such meetings would be held, but I want to assure the hon. member that, in view of the situation in the United States, I do intend to make arrangements as soon as possible.

Privilege—Miss MacDonald

[English]

PRIVILEGE

MISS MACDONALD—STATEMENTS MADE BY MR. AXWORTHY

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Madam Speaker, it is seldom that I rise on a question of privilege. This is only the second time I have done so in the eight years I have been a member of Parliament, so you will understand the seriousness I attach to the question of privilege I address to you today.

Yesterday the minister responsible for the status of women was charged by the president of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women with manipulation of the council's plans when he used his ministerial office to exert pressure on the council's executive to cancel an upcoming conference on the constitution.

The Advisory Council on the Status of Women was established in 1973 to provide independent, objective advice "to the government and to the public on matters of interest and concern to women and to advise the government on actions that the council deems necessary to improve the position of women in society". The council was carrying out that mandate when it made plans last summer to hold a national conference on the constitution to deal with a broad range of women's issues in various constitutional jurisdictions.

That conference, which was originally slated for last September, had to be rescheduled for February of this year. The conference plans were already well advanced and have only been called into question following a meeting last Friday between members of the executive committee of the council and the minister. It was at that meeting, the president now charges, that the minister exerted pressure to have the council change its plans to hold a constitutional conference for fear of possible embarrassment to the government.

The council's terms of reference, as spelled out by the then minister responsible for the status of women, the present Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Munro), on May 31, 1973, as reported at page 4282 of *Hansard*, ensured that the council would report to Parliament as well as to the minister responsible by making its recommendations and its reports public. In this way it was assumed that the advice and recommendations proffered would be both independent and objective.

In this respect the council is comparable to other councils which offer independent advice to government. I refer to councils such as the Economic Council of Canada and the International Joint Commission. I know of no occasion when a member of Parliament has felt it necessary to raise a question of privilege based on government interference with the work of these two bodies or, indeed, of any other council, commission or consultative body which offers independent advice to government and Parliament.

It is my contention that in interfering with the plans presented to the government "on actions that the council deems necessary to improve the position of women", in this case the