

Government Orders

tion, in this case regarding this very important bill, Bill C-74.

At the outset I want to say that my colleagues and I certainly do support this legislation in terms of recognizing the advantage of increasing the level of fines associated with convictions for general fishing offences as well as fisheries habitat offences. This is a move in the right direction, particularly when we look at the evidence. It is actually quite staggering. I have often wondered when one offends fisheries habitat, what is the cost? Is there a cost attached to it, if one is offending the fisheries generally?

The statistics that we were presented are from 1988, but it is fair to say that today it would be somewhat similar. In 1988, for the Pacific region alone, the convictions totalled 1,959, amounting to \$320,000 in fines. The average fine for a general fishing offence was \$266 and for the average sports fishing offence, the fine was \$90. This seems to be rather weak. The telling aspect was that habitat convictions totalled 11, with an average fine of \$3,135. In other words, out of all of the convictions of nearly 2,000, only 11 were the result of habitat problems. This comes at a time when we are concerned about the environment and reminds us all of too many scenes that we have seen.

I, for one, time and time again, have wandered up streams or canoed along lakes, only to notice that logging shows have been clear-cut in terms of whole mountainsides. We can argue the merit of that on a site-by-site basis, but we all know that when one logs a mountainside or a hillside down into a lake where fish are found, a band of trees is supposed to be left along the edge in order to protect the fisheries habitat. Often that is not the case. The logging takes place right into the river, right into the stream bed, or right into the lake.

The company then is caught. It is fined \$3,135 if it is caught. Of course, that is the cost of one good B.C. tree. When a mile of lakefront is harvested, we can see very quickly that a company would reap literally hundreds of thousands of dollars from that resource and in the process destroy what could be a very important fisheries habitat.

This legislation moves us now in the right direction. I think my colleagues would agree by saying that if one carries out fisheries habitat destruction, was caught, and had to pay a hefty fine, then so one should.

I want to congratulate my hon. friend for Prince George—Bulkley Valley. He put forward two very thoughtful amendments in the discussions in committee. They were some of the most thoughtful amendments I have ever witnessed while I have been a member of the House of Commons.

The first, for example, is an amendment that would fine an individual or a company guilty of a habitat infraction. Not only would they be fined appropriately—that is the minimum—but, if the court so ordered, but they would have to pay for the promotion of proper management and control of fisheries or fish habitat. We would be saying to the company: “Listen, you have carried out a dastardly deed in terms of the fishery habitat. While you probably should be serving 15 years in jail for this horrible offence against the environment, we as a court are going to say that you need to go out into the community and carry on a process to educate and demonstrate that you clearly understand what the offence of which you have been convicted.” In a sense, it would help educate the public generally. I think it is an excellent amendment and I congratulate my colleague for that thoughtful interjection.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

• (1650)

Mr. Riis: While I am dealing with the excellent amendments that my colleague from Prince George—Bulkley Valley made, I will go on to one other very important issue which is the requirement that of the government, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, file with the Parliament of Canada on an annual basis a report that lists all of the convictions that have occurred in the previous year in terms of convictions regarding fisheries habitat destruction so that we, as members of Parliament, can be appraised annually of the work being done.

It is not because we do not trust the government. Probably we do not trust the government, but in terms of individuals within the cabinet, we can say, sure, there are honourable people there. We are going to look to the minister responsible for the fisheries habitat and say, on an annual basis, we will be waiting with bated breath—no pun intended—for this report so that we can see that things have changed. If we find out that in a year only 11 convictions occurred as a result of the fisheries habitat, we will be very disappointed. We would then like to point