

**Hon. Thomas Siddon (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans):** Mr. Speaker, it is timely and appropriate that the Hon. Member for Skeena (Mr. Fulton) has urged upon you a special debate regarding this very serious tragedy which occurred in Prince William Sound as a result of an oil shipment from Prince William Sound to the southern states of the U.S. It reminds Canadians, Americans, and British Columbians particularly of the tremendous responsibility that we all have to ensure that in a society where we all depend on oil and energy in one form or another there are great risks associated with the transport of this energy. We must have confidence in the systems in place and assurance that the precious natural habitat and amenities of nature are not threatened by a tragic disaster of this magnitude.

To put this spill in context with another recent spill, the Grays Harbour spill as the Hon. Member for Skeena referred to it, this spill is some 50 times larger in magnitude, and it amounted to only about a fifth of the total capacity of this vessel being spilled in the early morning hours of Good Friday about ten days ago.

As a British Columbian, and as the Minister responsible for Fisheries and Oceans for Canada, Mr. Speaker, I can only tell you that we are not merely standing passively by and watching. We are certainly concerned. I would like to think Hon. Members opposite are as concerned as their spokesman was in his lead speech a moment ago. There is no monopoly in this House on concern for our precious habitat and for the necessity to ensure that this type of accident shall never occur in British Columbia coastal waters.

We have to be precise when we are discussing this very serious issue. I know there is room for a lot of emotion. In particular, I am concerned about the possible threat to our own British Columbia fisheries and marine mammal stocks, if this spill were to move in a direction where it might endanger the biological species and the precious values that we cherish so highly in British Columbia.

The Hon. Member for Skeena does the House a disservice when he makes statements, as he did in his letter to you this morning, Mr. Speaker, which are not true. It is important to recognize that at the present time, based upon the advice of our best scientists, oceanographers, and meteorologists, the oil spill is not moving toward Canadian coastal waters or the Canadian mainland. In fact, at the present time, the oil spill is moving to the southwest out along the Aleutian Peninsula and into the high north Pacific. I know that it is a great concern. We are all concerned that the 750 miles of

S. O. 52

shoreline within Prince William Sound has been hit with this disaster. We do not like to see the pictures of sea otters, marine mammals, and birds coated with oil and dying.

If we are going to assess this tragedy and learn from it, it is important that we tell the facts as they are. The Hon. Member for Skeena in his letter to Your Honour this morning stated: "the oil spill is clearly moving toward Canadian waters and the Canadian shoreline". It is important in the House that we give the facts accurately, and in fact that is not true. He further asserted in his letter to you that we must "mobilize the Canadian response to this spill as it damages our resource and moves toward Dixon Entrance." These statements are not true.

I can assure Canadians, as the Minister responsible for the Canadian Hydrographic Service and our Ocean Sciences Divisions that based on their direct observation and aerial surveillance—and I have full confidence in the accuracy of these facts when they were relayed to me—the oil from this tragic spill is not moving toward Canadian waters or toward our shoreline. I repeat, the oil from the tragic Valdez disaster is not moving toward the Canadian shoreline.

The oil spill from the Exxon *Valdez* has spread very predictably following the known current patterns, and as it has emerged from Prince William Sound and the Gulf of Alaska it is moving westward. I am sure the Hon. Member for Skeena and all Members opposite are familiar with the shape of the movement of the oil as of yesterday to the West.

Initially the spill spread generally southwest with the outflow within the Sound. Once it escaped from the Sound it was caught up in the large circulation which is characteristic of the northeast Pacific at this time of year. It is counter-clockwise, moving from east to west along the northern edge of the gulf.

I am not trying to diminish the problem. I am just trying to underscore the facts. It is imperative that Canadians be assured at this time that on the basis of all our best scientific evidence the spill is not moving toward the Canadian shoreline. Indeed, the predictions that have been made are holding true. The oil is presently due south of the west edge of Resurrection Bay. There are no signs of any oil west of that point. In consequence, I can say with full confidence that the oil is moving to the west and not toward Canadian waters, nor toward Dixon Entrance which is in fact more than 1,000 kilometres away.