

Fishing Industry

It is not only the seine fleet that has increased pressure in the resource. Because of higher prices for salmon, and a growing recreational fishery which includes rapidly growing charter services, the limited resource is being more heavily exploited from all sectors of the industry. The federal fisheries department cannot cope with this massive ability to catch fish.

The continuous failure to limit fleet size is the single most serious factor inhibiting the effective management of the fishery.

The difficulty in reducing the fleet at this late stage has been recognized by the minister and the management advisory council which established a subcommittee on commercial catch division to investigate the fair sharing of salmon amongst gear types. The gear types concerned are seine gear, troll gear and gillnet gear which are all vying for the same salmon. They have difficulty coming to grips with the problem of allocation which, if solved, could bring some stability to the situation. The subcommittee is made up of users of all gear types and most major organizations in the industry. Its purpose was to recommend the allocation to various gear type users and report back to the advisory council.

The complexity of this issue and the controversy of base years between gear types prevented any unanimity. The interim report of May 14, 1980, remains in the present minister's hands. The decision on allocation clearly lies in the domain of the minister and his department who must be made to offer some understanding to each gear type and determine what their quota or allocation should be.

Although the report states that catch allocation is not the panacea for all the industry's ills, it is considered as one means of ensuring the survival of each section of the salmon fleet, consistent with the historical catch performance of each section.

I detect a feeling, both in the fishing industry and in the department, that this year's poor season may offer the opportunity to reduce the fleet size.

I am certain those of us representing west coast constituencies have received phone calls, or letters, outlining the financial plight of individual fishermen and the strain this is putting on their families. They have been faced with a disastrous fishing season as a result of not only poor runs of salmon but several other factors which simply compounded poor fishing.

Costs of fuel and equipment have increased 25 per cent to 30 per cent making operating costs that much greater. Prices paid for salmon by the buyers have been reduced 10 per cent to 20 per cent on average and as much as 50 per cent in specific cases. This may be as a result of a surplus of sockeye in Alaska's Bristol Bay but may also be as a result of the growing concentration of buying power by B.C. Packers, who purchased the major properties of its largest competitor, Canadian Fish Co., last spring. B.C. Packers is not in a position to regulate prices paid to those fishermen. The Minister of Fisheries and Oceans should be concerned about the centralization of ownership and plant capacity and its effect on west coast fish prices, both to the fishermen and to consumers,

and on the employment opportunities in coastal British Columbia.

Centralization of processing has destroyed some of our smaller coastal communities, causing fishermen and their families to move to larger centres to seek jobs in an industry that they understand. This has had a disastrous effect on some of the coastal communities that have a long history in the fishing industry. We would ask the minister to address that problem, not only for the native people who are dependent on fisheries but others who have enjoyed the coastal community life.

● (1530)

Fishermen facing foreclosure on mortgages on their vessels are seeking assistance from the federal government. Their appeals to the fisheries improvement loans fund for new terms of payment are up 30 per cent to 40 per cent over last year already. That figure can be expected to climb as the fishing season comes to a close and more fishermen seek a way of retaining their vessels and remaining in their chosen profession.

When the minister answered my inquiries in the House on October 8 about financial aid to fishermen, he commented that I was slightly exaggerating the problems and that the department was monitoring the situation with the fishing industry. The Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Munro) had also mentioned the financial difficulties of native fishermen and, indeed, his monitoring device, which consisted of a questionnaire, determined serious problems which resulted in the establishment of \$4.2 million aid program to maintain the native fishery at its present state.

I would again request the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to re-evaluate the state of the fishing industry and the financial condition of the many fishermen in the industry today.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans must know from the demands on its Fisheries Improvement Loans Act, their own catch statistics, and from the decision of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, that serious financial conditions exist for many fishermen to recoup their losses in the next fishing season.

I am fully aware that many fishermen do not want the government subsidizing their industry through an aid program that would take the form of loan guarantees, or a moratorium on interest payments. My party and I are of the opinion that the B.C. salmon industry should not require subsidization, considering the value of the resource. However, the problems of the fisherman are not entirely of his or her own making. The federal government has allowed the fleet to expand, complicating good management procedures. It has let interest rates reach unconscionably high levels, and it has failed to protect the habitat, further leading to declining fish stocks.

We unalterably reject any callous attitude that may exist in the fishing community or in the department which sees the bankruptcy of individual fishermen as a way to fleet reduction. We also view another buy-back plan suspiciously. Considering the value of the newer vessels in the seine fleet, any significant reduction of the fleet would be extremely expensive and would