

*Adjournment Debate*

At the same time I was questioning the Minister of Fisheries about when there would be a response and the reason for the inordinate delay, I also indicated there was need for an increase in expertise in respect of the long-term problems with regard to the actual production of the raw product as well as the enhancement and expansion of the market for carrageen.

The minister indicated this is a new industry. It may be new to the minister, but it certainly is not new to the fishermen of Prince Edward Island who have been at it for many years. I was a little shocked by the minister's reference to it as a new industry. I had some reason to believe, because the minister in a sense shares boundary waters with me across the Northumberland Strait, and since he has some fishermen in his own area who are directly involved in this same industry, that he would be favourably disposed to increasing the competence not only of his own department—and there has been some excellent work done at the Resource Station at Miminegash by his own fisheries officers—but to increasing the expertise of the Department of Regional Economic Expansion.

It seems to me this is an opportunity for us to develop an industry in an area which at the same time would not jeopardize existing industry in other parts of the country. The parliamentary secretary represents a constituency which certainly is not directly involved with the Irish moss fishery and I would hope that would not jeopardize his own concern and conviction. As I understand it, the recommendation has now gone forward to Treasury Board and I would hope we would have a favourable answer shortly and that the subsidy would be implemented in time to alleviate some of the economic hardships referred to by the Fishermen's Association when it wrote in July.

I wrote a similar letter on October 27 which I will not impose upon the House this evening. I simply elaborated in some detail my own investigation and the further justification for the position taken by the Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association. I would hope therefore we would have a speedy response on the request for a subsidy, a much speedier implementation of the subsidy itself and equally, and perhaps even more important in the long term, some indication of a commitment that the government will take seriously the potential in relation to Irish moss so that the industry will be able to expand its own capacity. I hope the government will assist in the full development of the potential market which I think is there for this very important industry on the east coast.

**Mr. Jim Fleming (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Fisheries and the Environment):** Mr. Speaker, I wish I had more time available to me tonight to respond in some detail to the hon. member for Egmont (Mr. MacDonald). I do know, however, from my checking into this particular situation in order to prepare for my response tonight, that the Department of Fisheries and the minister are very well aware of the work

the hon. member has done on behalf of his constituents in respect to this problem, and the very real contribution he has made in developing and encouraging an active role by the Government of Canada through the Department of Fisheries.

I think perhaps when the hon. member expresses some concern about the Minister of Fisheries calling it a newer industry, it is all a matter of perspective. Fishing goes back many thousands of years and the Irish moss industry goes back in any size in Canada to the 1950's. I think it was only in 1974 that it peaked as an industry in Canada. I think the hon. member mentioned some statistics. In total in the maritimes there were some 131 million pounds harvested. There are more than 1,700 Irish moss harvesters in this industry so indeed it is very important, as the hon. member for Egmont pointed out.

I should add that in parts of Prince Edward Island we know, and the hon. member is aware of the fact, that more than one half the income of the fishermen comes from the harvesting of Irish moss. Of course there was a slump in the market in 1974 and I think that is what led to much of the problem today. The demand has now gone up but the prices have not, and in turn some of the people involved in the harvesting, some of the fisheries workers, face added costs in transportation from the dock to the drying plant. So indeed they do have serious problems.

**Mr. MacDonald (Egmont):** The slump was in 1975.

**Mr. Fleming:** It followed the peak in 1974, and the problem has continued. I do think the department has played a lead role through the industrial development branch of the Fisheries and Marine Service in helping the expansion of the industry. Certainly they were helped in the 1960's in developing drying techniques which have been useful, since Irish moss must be dried and shipped to other countries for distillation into carrageen. But I agree that there is a serious problem and I am certainly pleased I can tell the hon. member, as he seems to know himself, that the Department of Fisheries looks sympathetically on the request of the people involved in this industry for a subsidy because of their current plight.

The department is also very concerned—and that has been part of the cause for the delay—with doing further studies and investigating what can be done in the long range to determine how this harvest develops and how it is affected by other environmental aspects. That has been part of their thinking in trying not to reach a conclusion only on subsidies but also on the long range program for research to assist the industry.

I can say to the hon. member that the department will be reaching a decision shortly which, we are optimistic, will be positive both with regard to the subsidies in the short term and also in the long term with regard to planning and assistance.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner):** A motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m.

Motion agreed to and the House adjourned at 10.28 p.m.