

Damage to Shoreline by Passing Ships

made provision that the federal government was responsible in the main for damage caused by the wake from freight-laden ships to the banks of inland waters and rivers. Later this provision was amended to include any damage that might be caused by a change in the motion of the waters due to the building of any government dock, wharf or marina where it could be amply proved that the existence of such a structure changed the current to such a degree or changed the normal flow of the water to such a degree that it caused monetary hardship to the owners of adjacent property.

● (1700)

Mr. Speaker, the course of events in this country has changed the situation which these laws were designed to cover. When they were adopted most of our navigable waters and the banks adjacent thereto were owned by the Crown. Along the shores of these waters there were many homesteads, and the homesteaders based their livelihood on lumbering and hunting. There was some agricultural activity, but not of an intensive nature. In those days these lands did not have the value they have today. This shoreline is today very valuable. We find many private dwellings and estates in these areas. We also find rich farmland and a great deal of industrial development, and I have in mind marinas, motels, hotels and other like accommodation for tourists from this and other nations.

The damage caused by the wakes of boats plying these waters is considerable in some areas, and the cost of keeping the water back from low-lying areas is high. The people who own this property should not be responsible for the constant repair of dykes and shorelines being eroded in this manner. It is my contention that the federal government should be responsible for the repair and maintenance of the shorelines on our navigable waters.

Many tourists are being encouraged to come to this country these days, and many of them here by boat. This traffic is especially concentrated in certain areas in Ontario adjacent to our great bodies of water. Many tourists from the United States have easy access to our resort areas. In my own area large flotillas of pleasure craft traverse the waters visiting various towns and cities. This represents a tremendous source of income to the merchants and those who provide these tourist services.

While there is a problem in relation to the erosion of our shorelines, certainly the solution is not to discourage tourism. These people plying our rivers and lakes bring in thousands of dollars, but the damage to our shorelines is tremendous. You may recall, Mr. Speaker, that some two years ago a number of citizens tried to stop the tourists travelling in the waters in my area. Many signs were put up asking these tourists not to use the river, and there were verbal exchanges between tourists and those on the shore. I understand that there were fruits and vegetables thrown at passing tourists. This is something that should be discouraged as the tourism industry represents a tremendous asset to this nation as a whole. Financially, this industry is one of our most profitable and we want to encourage it in every possible way.

The purpose of the motion before the House is to request the government to give consideration to a revision of our prevailing archaic laws under which these boats are

[Mr. Danforth.]

plying our navigable waters. These laws relate to domestic and foreign traffic. The traffic during our tourist season represents many times the traffic that normally travelled these waters when these laws were put into effect. It seems to me that we should take the same approach at the federal level as we take at the provincial level, treating our waterways as we treat our highways. We should no longer think of our navigable streams in terms of the horse and buggy days.

Years ago when these laws were brought into effect our highways in this country were only small trails which gave access to horses and wagons. With the advent of the automobile the governments in this nation found it necessary to upgrade our highway systems, and this has been carried out successfully. It seems to me that we should take the same approach in respect of our navigable waters.

When damage is done along our highways, the departments of various governments are quick to act. This is particularly true in respect of our Trans-Canada Highway. Surely, this is the approach that we must take, as our waterways will be used more and more in future rather than less, particularly as the tourist industry increases. We must do something now because those who live on the shores of these waterways cannot afford the tremendous financial cost of repairing and maintaining the shoreline.

An attempt has been made to limit the speed of tourist boats plying the waterways in order to lessen the damage caused by the wakes of these boats. There is a speed limit in effect on most of our rivers, and that limit is enforced admirably, but it has become apparent that speed limits by themselves do not provide a solution. We have observed recently that speed alone does not cause the damage. Many of these vessels travel at reasonable speeds, but because of the size of the vessels the wake or the wash is exceptional. It seems that we must revise our laws in order to bring some semblance of order out of what is quickly becoming a chaotic situation. Many of those who own the shore property are boat owners. Some of them operate marinas, and it is a joy to behold how carefully these people preserve and maintain the rights of other owners of shoreline property.

The purpose of this bill is to alleviate the burden on the shoulders of those who own shoreline property. I hope it finds favour in the House, and I hope that something can be done to rectify what is now becoming a very grievous situation, not only in that area I have the honour to represent, but in all areas where there are navigable waters used by our own boat owners and many tourists.

Mr. Paul E. McRae (Fort William): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to speak on this motion because, as the hon. member for Kent-Essex (Mr. Danforth) has pointed out, the problems which exist in his area also exist in my area in Ontario. The problems created by the rapid speed of boats and ships of one kind or another is considerable. Shoreline erosion is a very definite problem. Right in my neighbourhood a number of small pleasure craft, yachts and even larger boats, move up and down the river creating erosion problems.

This difficulty has been increased by the creation of a provincial park further up the river. The erosion problems are considerable, but I must point out that the federal