

Supply

principle countries closest to it, have a role here as global custodians.

Mr. David D. Stupich (Nanaimo—Cowichan): The member questioned my comment on the growth in the seal population. I wonder if he has discussed this with the minister. It was the minister who, at a briefing, I believe on February 20, when hosting a breakfast for a group of MPs, told us that the population had gone from, and I am trying to recall the figures now, two million up to 3.6 million, which is almost a doubling in that period. I wonder if he has consulted the minister about the information he has with respect to the seal population. It seems to be at variance with what the minister has unless he is suggesting that the minister just picked this out of the air.

Also, he told us that out of 550 seals, three had identifiable cod in the stomachs. Can he tell us something about the contents of the others? Were some of them empty perhaps? The reputation that seals have is of eating the cod belly which is soft and easy to accommodate their stomachs rather than the head bone and the other bones.

I am wondering whether there were contents in the stomachs of some of these seals that just could not be identified as to just exactly what they were.

Mr. Boyer: Two questions. The number of 3.3 is the one being used by the Department of Fisheries. There is other information there as well in the Department of Fisheries, looking at projections. I think the numbers game here is always a difficult one. None of us can actually know definitively the numbers that are there. There are some numbers that I think are vastly exaggerated that are being put out as part of the effort to say that the real and only problem here is the seal population as a way of avoiding dealing with the problems of overfishing in the outer fishery, the over-licensing with respect to the inshore fishery, all of these other problems.

My point is simply to say that discussion with respect to the seals ought to be kept in balance in that context and not to make it a scapegoat. Yes, it depends on the season, of course, when one is looking at seals' stomachs to see what kind of food or amount is in there in the season, where they are and so on. I will list the species of fish and invertebrates that were found in the stomachs of those

seals. This is in alphabetical order; it is not in the order of quantity.

There is Arctic cod, which is not to be confused with Atlantic cod. There was Atlantic cod which includes the northern cod. There was barracudina, capelin, eelpout, flatfish, including witch and plaice, fourbeard rocklings, Greenland halibut, grenadiers, hake, herring, redfish, sandlance, sculpins and skate. As well, they found that the seals were eating invertebrates as follows: amphipods, crab, decapods, euphausiids, mysids, shrimp, squid and octopus.

• (1220)

The other number that is important to bear in mind when we are looking at this is the notion that the seal population is increasing without any human intervention. Canada in fact still has the largest annual seal hunt in the world. The current quota is some 186,000 harp seals per year and I think last year the number was around 50,000 seals that were killed. That is another number to be kept in bounds as to what is actually happening here.

Mr. Dennis Mills (Broadview—Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask a specific question of the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore.

We always hear, especially those of us who live in larger urban areas like Toronto, from the environmental groups whenever there is an international crisis related to the environment. They are always knocking on our doors and telling us about the interdependency of the world that we live in. As members of Parliament, we are always very sensitive to react to the forces and the needs of the environmental groups that exist within our communities. Of course, many of these environmental groups have international linkages that are always educating the whole world on the ecosystem that we are all involved with and living with here.

Does the member not think that maybe it is time that all of us as parliamentarians should turn and challenge the environmental groups of this country and also of the rest of the world to pick up their placards and their systems of communication to put pressure on those countries that are not respecting the ecosystem here, the sustainable development formula and use the same kind of energy on this as they do on other issues?

Mr. Boyer: Mr. Speaker, the answer is yes. To elaborate, the minister himself said that with some NGOs and some environmental groups, his relationship or the