

The Address—Mr. G. A. P. Smith

• (1250)

If these figures are correct—and they are the best obtainable—the fishery, and consequently the future livelihood of those engaged in the salmon fishery, was in grave danger. For the ban to have any noticeable effect, it should be continued for one complete salmon life cycle, namely, for about five years.

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) was in New Brunswick during the course of the election campaign, and particularly in my riding though in other ridings in New Brunswick as well, the commercial salmon fishing ban was quite an election topic. The Leader of the Opposition was questioned on his position with regard to the salmon ban and he replied to the effect that in view of the better run in 1972 the ban should be reconsidered. This does not make sense to me from a conservation viewpoint. Neither does it make any economic sense to the fishermen in view of the generous compensation formula announced by the minister to be in effect during this ban.

If any member wonders why the government of Canada should be involved in paying compensation as the result of declining stocks of a certain species of fish, I would agree that this is the first time that this has been done in similar circumstances. The compensation with respect to swordfish which were found to have an unacceptable mercury content was a different situation. The sale of that species was prohibited by regulation of a government of another jurisdiction. In the case of salmon the decline was due to various factors, notably the high seas fishery on the part chiefly of the Danes, and to some extent pollution of spawning rivers.

These are factors over which the fishermen had absolutely no control. But they were matters over which the government of Canada could or should have some control or jurisdiction either by persuasion or by legal means. Hence the principle of compensation was agreed upon. It is a tribute to members from all parts of Canada that not one dissenting voice was heard when the government of Canada decided to spend an as yet unknown sum amounting to millions of dollars in order to save this valuable species of fish on the east coast of Canada. Salmon have long since disappeared from the rivers of the eastern United States, at least for all practical purposes.

The Minister of Fisheries is also to be congratulated for his efforts in convincing the government that measures should be taken to relieve the economic hardship on fishermen during the ban. I feel I should offer this word of congratulation to him in view of the roasting he is being given by officers of various commercial fishermen's associations, as published in the daily papers in New Brunswick during the last two weeks or so.

It is also a tribute to our federal system of government that the nation as a whole can come to the rescue of an area or a group or industry that is in difficulty. It is obvious that the province of New Brunswick with its limited financial resources could never have provided the millions of dollars required to avert the disaster, which is what it would be, of the decline and possible demise of the Atlantic salmon.

I regret, Mr. Speaker, the time I have taken in pursuing this subject but I make no apology for it. All members

[Mr. Smith (Northumberland-Miramichi).]

have listened with great interest and patience to problems in other parts of this wide country far removed from the immediate concerns of their own region or constituency.

I have said that a generous formula of compensation was offered to those salmon fishermen, so hon. members may ask what is the problem—and I indicated that there was a problem. The compensation formula provided for payment annually during the ban, up to five years, of an amount equal to the average of each fisherman's best three consecutive years' gross income catch in recent years. The best years chosen varied in different areas. In the case of the Miramichi set net fishermen, the years 1965-66-67 inclusive were chosen by the fishermen. As I have said, the formula was generous and the intention of the minister was obviously to be generous. The problem that now arises is that his departmental officers, either at the regional office at Halifax or here in Ottawa, or both, apparently thought that the formula was too generous and have taken it upon themselves to set arbitrary figures for the catch of individual fishermen, mailing them a cheque marked "final payment".

This is why I asked the minister in the House yesterday whether he would provide an appeal procedure. This he said he would do and indicated that he would undertake the task himself. I wish him success, but it will require a long time to delve into the details of individual claims by those who wish to appeal. I doubt whether the minister has the time to spend hearing appeals in the province or on the east coast from fishermen in the Saint John area and the Miramichi area, and it would be unrealistic to require the fishermen to come to Ottawa with their records and other evidence, including witnesses. I therefore feel that an appeal committee comprised of some person or persons acceptable both to the department and to the fishermen will have to be established.

The question is complicated because many of the fishermen, being small operators mostly earning below the level that would require them to pay income tax, did not keep adequate records of their catch. The payments made to them by the department indicate that they are being severely, and I feel unjustly, penalized for this. Many of the compensation payments appear ridiculous to me, and I have a considerable knowledge of this fishery. They bear no relationship to the claims filed, even those which were supported by adequate records.

In this connection I should mention that because of a policy set out by the minister in 1971 several salmon fishermen lost their licences by the operation of a section that disqualified them if they held a full-time job in an industry other than fishing. However, the minister at that time set up a licence review committee to relieve hardship where extenuating circumstances existed. This would apply, for example, to a fisherman with a large family who, although holding steady employment, had an income from such employment in the \$3,000 to \$4,000 range. The appeal committee, acting as it was meant to act, reinstated about ten fishermen, but in these cases no compensation was paid or offered by the department. I feel that these reinstated fishermen should be treated in the same manner as others.

I have talked for a long time about fishermen and salmon but I shall conclude this part of my remarks by