

Supply

I wanted to ask the Secretary of State for External Affairs why this avenue is not being pursued or, if it is being pursued, what the results of her efforts so far have been and whether we could expect the government to be taking strong action to strengthen the NAFO regime from a conservation perspective.

Failing that, it seems that the motion before the House today is obviously the next step. There is really no other place for this government to go but to affirm Canada's functional jurisdiction over those zones. There is no other way, in the absence of any responsible behaviour by the states which are fishing that zone and in the absence of any regulatory regime which can be enforced and where objections by countries such as Canada have any legitimacy. We are currently seeing the depletion of a fish stock with drastic consequences for the economies of eastern Canada, particularly Newfoundland but also Nova Scotia. We would think this government ought to be working to strengthen the only organization that is governing those regimes.

• (1710)

That was the first point I wanted to raise with the Secretary of State for External Affairs. Perhaps when she reads *Hansard* she may want to provide me and this House with the answer to that question. I would be very interested in hearing it.

It is important to underscore, as has been said by several speakers today, that this issue is not an issue which is confined to one part of Canada. It is true that the province of Newfoundland which depends vitally on the fishing industry, particularly the fishing industry centred in the northern cod zone, stands to be devastated by the collapse of this fishery. It is also true that the province of Nova Scotia is in the same situation, although perhaps less directly than Newfoundland. In my own constituency of Cape Breton Highland—Canso we have plants that fish the northern cod and other ground-fish stocks which stand to be depleted by the excessive fishing in those zones.

This is an issue which extends beyond Newfoundland to Nova Scotia and, as other members have pointed out, to all of Canada. It is an environmental issue of alarming proportions when we see countries purporting to pay lip service to environmental concerns completely denying

these concerns. We are facing a very serious situation which we in Canada have a right and a responsibility to take a leadership role in correcting.

Hon. Roger C. Simmons (Burin—St. George's): Mr. Speaker, first of all let me congratulate my friend and my colleague from Cape Breton Highlands—Canso for his excellent participation in this important debate.

He was here a moment ago, as I was, when we witnessed a spectacle that I really could not believe. At the same time it confirmed for me something I had suspected for some time. I want to see if I am out in left field on this or whether or not my friend from Cape Breton Highlands—Canso shares my view on it.

I had been alleging for some time that the minister of fisheries would very dearly like to get on with this issue in the spirit of the wording of the motion. He realizes the futility of diplomacy, sweet talk and so on. He realizes as one who lives among the people most affected by this, as a man who represents those people, that it is time to bite the bullet. I had been alleging his problem was that he was alone in the cabinet.

For the record, he has had to say otherwise and to say: "Oh, no, my Prime Minister is behind me; everybody over here is behind me". Was I wrong? Is it too late in the day? Am I having some kind of illusions? Am I misleading myself? I saw the Secretary of State for External Affairs, who ought to be our lead spokesperson on this, half sleepily read very badly a text that somebody had prepared for her. Her heart clearly was not in it. She refused to take any questions beyond what was required of her.

Would the member want to comment on whether he thinks my suspicions are correct? Is it the problem of the minister of fisheries? Was it confirmed before our very eyes in the Chamber just now that the people who matter most in this play, including the Secretary of State for External Affairs, could not care less about this file? That is one of the reasons it is going nowhere, unless the minister of fisheries takes it in hand, delivers an ultimatum to the Prime Minister, and says it is time to do what has to be done with respect to this foreign overfishing.

Does he agree the real problem is that the people whose support he needs are not coming to his defence and indeed are laughing at the whole issue?