

Fisheries Act

try (Mr. Davis) has indicated that he does not plan to license any ships for deep sea lobster operations at the present time. He has indicated this in a letter to me. But he still maintains in that letter that the repeal of section 31 of the Fisheries Act would have no immediate effect on the lobster fisheries. I submit that his stated intentions are not good enough. I submit that the protection required and requested by the inshore lobster fishermen is embodied in section 31 of the Fisheries Act. The Minister of Fisheries and Forestry, for whom I have a high personal regard, looks quite healthy but he may well not survive the rigours of this Parliament and he may well be replaced by another Minister of Fisheries and Forestry with entirely different views.

For this reason, the protection that is required by our inshore lobster fishermen must be guaranteed by statute, by Canadian law. Quite frankly, I find it hard to understand the reasoning which prompted this action by the minister who seeks to repeal section 31. I say this because of the strong objections that have been raised by the lobster fishermen to his proposed action.

The inshore lobster fishermen have every reason to be concerned. Many of these fishermen, during the period when the inshore lobster season is open, fish or set their traps within Canadian territorial waters. However, others set their traps outside our territorial waters, outside the 12-mile limit, on shoals or ledges that may be five to twenty miles beyond our territorial waters and are therefore classed as high seas areas. Under section 31 they are prohibited from landing lobsters from these ledges and shoals outside our territorial waters when the season for catching lobsters in our territorial waters is closed. But they have always accepted this regulation in the hope that the closed period would help improve the quantity of lobsters on the ledges and shoals outside the 12-mile limit and thereby give them a fair living over the years.

Now, however, without any explanation from the government or from the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry, this section of the Fisheries Act which protected their resource is to be repealed. Licensed deep sea lobster fishermen could fish on these ledges and shoals that are just beyond the 12-mile limit and while doing so they would be depleting lobster stocks which for years have been considered to be the resource of the inshore lobster fishermen. The Minister of Fisheries may

well say that this would not be done. I believe that in his heart he is convinced that it would not be done. He may well say that any deep sea lobster operation would have the area clearly spelled out in which the deep sea operator can set his traps, namely, George's Bank. But I ask him, "How is the inshore lobster fishermen supposed to know what the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry is thinking or, for that matter, whether there is any thinking-minister in the government these days?"

How would the minister know, if he licensed a deep sea lobster operation, whether the lobsters on the ship, when it landed its catch, all came from George's Bank or if some of them came from ledges and shoals 25 or 30 miles from shore? He has made no announcement about plans to improve the protection service, and the present staff is inadequate and ill equipped to carry out this type of patrol, control or law enforcement. Is it any wonder that the inshore lobster fishermen are worried? I submit that the minister would be worried also if he saw his livelihood threatened in this manner.

What effect will a licensed deep sea lobster operation have on the price paid for lobsters to the inshore lobster fishermen? What marketing studies did the minister carry out before he unilaterally decided, without any obvious discussion with the parties most interested, to encourage deep sea lobster fishing? These are questions that the fishermen want answered. Will the price of lobsters go down or will it go up when the lobster pounds are assured of a steady supply of offshore lobsters on a year-round basis, or will it remain at its present level due to new markets which the minister may have discovered in some other country? These are just some of the questions that are posed to me by disturbed fishermen.

In view of the many uncertainties brought about by the minister's unilateral action, I urge him and the members of his party to retain section 31 of the Fisheries Act at least until he has had an opportunity to study the matter more thoroughly and until he has had consultations with the people who really understand the lobster industry, namely, the inshore lobster fishermen. For all these reasons I hope that the amendment moved by the hon. member for South Western Nova (Mr. Comeau) will receive the support of the House.

Mr. Thomas S. Barnett (Comox-Alberni): Mr. Speaker, I think it is fair to say that in my experience the bill before us, to amend