

Mr. Churchill: I move the adjournment of the debate.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

ACCEPTANCE OF FISHERIES COMMISSION

RECOMMENDATION RESPECTING

HALIBUT

Mr. T. S. Barnett (Comox-Alberni) moved:

That an humble address be presented to His Excellency praying that he will cause to be laid before this house a copy of the cabinet minute or other official document which authorized the Secretary of State for External Affairs to notify the executive director, the international north Pacific fisheries commission, by telegram under date of May 10, 1963, that the commission's recommendations for the removal of the halibut stocks in the eastern Bering sea and the herring stocks west of the Queen Charlotte islands from the annex to the convention had been accepted by the government of Canada.

He said: Mr. Speaker, this motion has been standing in my name for some time. It was transferred for debate on October 16, and in order to set the matter in perspective I might perhaps just quote the remarks made by the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Martin) on that occasion. He said, as reported on page 3625 of *Hansard* for October 16, 1963:

The government, as my hon. friend knows, approved the three recommendations of the international north Pacific fisheries commission concerning the removal of halibut stock in the eastern Bering sea and herring stock west of the Queen Charlotte islands from the annex of the north Pacific fisheries convention. This decision was communicated to the executive director of the commission on May 10. Action was taken on the authority of this cabinet decision and no other official document exists.

With regard to the production of the actual cabinet minute, as my hon. friend I am sure well knows, it is a well established rule in Canadian parliamentary practice that the texts of cabinet minutes are not made public. I regret, therefore, I cannot agree to the motion and I ask my hon. friend to be good enough to withdraw it.

My reply was as follows:

I would not quarrel with the general principle enunciated by the minister in respect of cabinet minutes, but it does seem to me there are some particular circumstances surrounding the situation which the minister has outlined in connection with this matter. It is apparent from what he has said that there are no other official documents in connection with the action taken by the government.

It seems to me there are some special circumstances attached to this kind of situation. I should like to ask, therefore, following the good example of the present minister in the previous parliament, to have this motion transferred to a place on the order paper where it would become a debatable motion.

The terms of my motion which you have read to the house, Mr. Speaker, make it clear that I was not directly asking for the production of a cabinet minute. My motion does say "cabinet minute or other official document".

Fisheries Commission Recommendation

At the time I drafted this motion I had been led to believe that there perhaps was no other official document, but I was hopeful that there might be one which I had not been able to discover. I should like to make it clear that I had no intention of asking the government directly to produce a cabinet minute as such.

The reason I felt this motion should be debated was that if there were no other documents than the cabinet minute, a rather peculiar and regrettable state of affairs, then the cabinet minute being the only official record of the action taken by the Canadian government to amend an international treaty, that should become public property. If the situation is as indicated by the Secretary of State for External Affairs in his earlier reply to me, then the public of Canada and the members of this house have never had any official notification that the annex to this treaty has been amended.

As the house will recall, a rather important and controversial matter is involved. I realize fully that it is not within the rules on this occasion to debate the merits or demerits of the action the government took. However, in order to put this matter in perspective, I feel I should be permitted to point out that when the original proposals of the international commission came to the attention of the house during the last parliament, this was obviously quite a controversial matter. It was considered to be of grave importance by hon. members, particularly those who came from British Columbia whose fisheries were most directly affected by this north Pacific convention.

I should remind the house that this concern was shared by most of the other members from British Columbia and by the Liberal members of this house who represented British Columbia, including the present Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources (Mr. Laing). I recall that on one occasion he asked the then minister of fisheries about this matter and suggested it should go before the marine and fisheries committee prior to a decision being taken by the government. He suggested that this could possibly have disastrous consequences. Those are his words, as I recall them. I found it difficult to understand, therefore, when the present government acted precipitately on this matter and apparently tried to shove it under the rug, so that parliament and the people of Canada would not be aware of what has taken place. Quite frankly, this is the only interpretation I can place upon the fact that the only official record of the action taken by the government of Canada in this connection is some cabinet minute.

This matter goes back, of course, for some time. I suppose the members of the present administration could argue that this was a