

### *Fishing Industry*

as important, they are suffering from the long-term effects because the fishery there is being over-exploited by the U.S. fishermen, with the approval of the U.S. Senate.

This debate is equally as important today because the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans (Mr. LeBlanc) is currently on the west coast meeting with a ministerial advisory committee in an attempt to implement some changes in the west coast fishing industry. It is hoped that he will discuss significant policy decisions today and perhaps address some of the concerns that I shall outline in my remarks.

● (1520)

We are not too impressed by the way in which the minister makes decisions. We have been somewhat critical of his appointment of Dr. Peter Pearse and Mr. Doucet who are to take a cursory tour of the province and talk briefly to people in the fishing industry in order to assess—probably to assess the political climate and make political decisions, rather than the real needs of that industry. We reject the use of individuals to make policy statements that the minister and his department should make.

This is particularly critical for the fishermen and shore workers and their families in British Columbia. There has been a serious decline in salmon returns this season and they fear that the stocks are in serious jeopardy and that their livelihood will be at stake. Combined with growing fears that our herring roe fishery cannot withstand the extreme pressure exerted by the size of the fleet, this may result in a more objective examination of the west coast than has been possible in the last three years.

Hon. members will recall the television programs and news reports which showed bags of money being passed around in the fishing fleet, particularly in the herring season. This gave people in Canada the impression that west coast fishermen are wealthy and do not need government assistance, and that they were not in dire straits this year. These sensational stories are really not true; they are an aberration of the true story of fishermen and of the industry in British Columbia. There have been good years in the industry but there have also been years of suffering when the salmon do not return in the numbers that are expected.

In previous years fishermen were aware of what to expect from their fishing year. They had a respect for their fellow fishermen, the resource, and for the fisheries officers and managers, whose task was to see that enough stock escaped to spawn and return a bounty to the ocean which would be harvested again in two to five years.

The tasks for fishermen and managers, were not so complicated when fewer people were fishing and there were fewer boats. There are great pressures in the industry at the present time because of the increased number of boats involved and the types of gear involved.

Recognition of the problems occurred in the mid-1960s when it was obvious that unlimited entry into the industry was resulting in a larger fleet and increasing difficulty in managing

stocks to provide an adequate harvest as well as to permit escapement.

The Davis plan for licence limitations and a "buy back" program was introduced. The objective was to limit the size of the fleet and thus provide better income to those fishermen who remained in the industry as well as ensuring ease of management for the department.

The Davis plan has not brought about the desired effects and may have, instead, caused the additional problem of overcapitalization that it hoped to prevent. By licensing the vessels instead of the fishermen, the licence has become a commodity to buy and sell, thus increasing the costs in the industry. Vessels which were unused for years became valuable and were used for licence transfers to new vessels. Several smaller vessels were often utilized to pyramid or to build larger and more efficient vessels with a higher tonnage.

Instead of alleviating the problems of management of stocks and bringing stability to the industry, it now has become evident that the licence limitation and buy back program failed. If the plan itself was not a failure, then the responsibility for failure must rest with the government responsible for its implementation. Failure to curtail the rapid proliferation of larger and more efficient vessels, particularly in the seine fleet, has now resulted in added capacity, making the task of managing the fleet through opening and closings for gear types, an almost impossible task.

The seine fleet has exploded to over 600 vessels from the 370 present in the industry in 1969, at the beginning of the Davis plan. The federal government remained silent and remains today as this fleet increases in size and as larger trollers with freezer capacity are being built.

The build up continues in the face of the Sinclair report on a licensing and fee system for British Columbia. In his report, Sinclair estimates the fleet is three or four times larger than need be, and others estimate the size to be greater than that. Why, then, have we had no action on a moratorium on new boat construction? It will take decades of determined effort in the face of many serious problems before we can hope to provide enough fish adequately to support the investment that fishermen currently have in the salmon industry.

This year's decline in salmon stocks is clear warning that decisions on a variety of matters are long overdue. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans estimate that salmon stocks are down 25 per cent to 30 per cent this year alone. That is evidence enough that our hopes for improving salmon runs through the salmonid enhancement program will be long and difficult. The combination of this year's decline with an equally discouraging ten-year decline demands immediate action to reverse this trend.

Over the last ten years there has been a decline in west coast salmon stocks of approximately 30 per cent. There is a serious problem not only with Atlantic salmon but also with Pacific salmon. That trend is worldwide, but this government must take action immediately to alleviate some of the causes.