

Government Orders

TAGS took effect on May 16 and replaces two Conservative government programs, the northern cod adjustment and recovery program and the Atlantic groundfish adjustment program.

The Atlantic groundfish strategy is a five year program which will provide a range of options for an estimated 30,000 groundfish fishermen and plant workers. It has several components which I would like to review at this time.

First, there is financial support here of between \$200 and \$382 per week. Second, it provides for training programs including literacy training, adult basic education, university study programs, leadership training, career guidance training and entrepreneurial training.

Another aspect of it is that participants will take part in employment projects called green projects which will be designed to preserve and enhance the environment and designed to provide fishermen and plant workers with new skills and job experience.

Another thing that TAGS will do is provide an employment bonus to participants who find and accept work outside the fishery. It will also provide an affordable wage subsidy which will be paid to employers outside the fishery sector to hire fishermen and plant workers in permanent, full time employment and provide on the job training.

Another thing is that this program will provide employment counselling, mobility and relocation assistance to those workers who want to move to find work. Program participants will also have access to self-employment assistance to help them create their own jobs. All of these can be very positive measures.

Finally, we come to the Atlantic groundfish strategy which will provide an older worker adjustment program or an early retirement package for fish plant workers between the ages of 50 and 65 who do not want to participate in any of these other programs. This is the reason for Bill C-30. That is why the government introduced it and that is the reason we are here today.

• (1235)

First, I commend the government for the Atlantic groundfish strategy. Reformers believe that it is an improvement over the programs that it replaces. It requires participants to participate in training and upgrading programs, work on community projects and a range of labour adjustment options and incentives to get fishermen and plant workers back to work.

I think many of the measures were designed to provide participants with a number of choices to fit their particular circumstances and needs. I also think the programs were designed to save the government money in the long run by trying to get these participants back to work. I commend the government for the thought that went into these programs. There seems to

have been some real innovative thinking based on the premise that what we have done in the past has not worked.

I believe the program design indicates a legitimate desire on behalf of the government to try and use these programs to avoid or break up the dependency cycle which often accompanies government programs of this nature.

I look forward to finding out how they actually work, to see if any of these measures have application in the rest of Canada particularly as they relate to the larger task of reforming our social programs currently under review in the Department of Human Resources Development.

So much for the compliments. Let us get to Bill C-30, the plant older worker adjustment program. The innovative thinking seems to have stopped at this point. Bill C-30 will amend the Department of Labour Act to allow the Minister of Human Resources Development to enter into federal-provincial agreements and provide for an early retirement package of up to \$1,000 per month for approximately 1,200 fish plant workers between the ages of 50 and 65. This is estimated to cost between \$53 million and \$67 million. The total cost of the program is to be shared by the federal and provincial governments on a 70 per cent 30 per cent basis respectively.

The government will purchase annuities for older fish plant workers, the amount to be calculated on the basis of 70 per cent of their UI benefits, up to a monthly maximum of \$1,000.

While this guaranteed income is currently only available to fish plant workers, government officials advise that a similar package is now being designed for fishermen. As we can see the measure is going to be expanded.

It seems every time we target a new program for a certain group it creates inequities and others say "Me too", so we create another program. It has a snowballing effect. We get into the mess we are in now and it is costing us millions and billions of dollars.

Government officials explained the rationale for this new program. They said that some fish plant workers will not want to participate in the other program options offered by the government. They said that providing up to \$1,000 per month to these older workers would in fact save the government money. Benefits under the Atlantic groundfish strategy will range from a minimum of \$867 per month to a maximum of \$1,655 per month.

Unfortunately, Reformers believe the government has not thought this final measure out very well. Under TAGS the 30,000 unemployed fishermen and plant workers will be required to participate in a wide range of measures designed to get them back to work, that is if they are under 50 years of age. However, the fish plant older worker adjustment program and any subsequent early retirement package designed for fishermen are designed with the view that these workers are no longer employable. Age 50 and you are no longer employable, no