

Oral Questions

Yesterday in St. Anthony, Newfoundland nearly 1,000 men and women marched and demonstrated, calling upon governments and calling upon politicians of every stripe to acknowledge and to deal constructively with the crisis in the fishery. These people have been without income since May 15 and have no prospect of future income in the face of the imminent moratorium on northern cod stocks.

I want to ask the Prime Minister whether or not the government is prepared to consider now making available assistance to sustain these families until such time as a long-term program to rebuild cod stocks is put in place by the minister of fisheries and long-term assistance made available to those who are going to be displaced because of conservation measures.

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the government is very concerned about the situation of the fishermen not only in St. Anthony but throughout Newfoundland and Labrador and Atlantic Canada where their incomes have dropped quite dramatically because of the problem of cod stocks and fishing stocks generally for reasons that we are acquainted with.

• (1440)

One of the reasons why the government in 1990 responded with a \$584 million Atlantic Fisheries Adjustment Program, and I think almost a \$40 million catch failure program the next year, was precisely to accommodate this sad reality. The situation has not improved and the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans has been working on a program that we think will be helpful and constructive.

I have been talking to some of the union leaders in Newfoundland as late as last evening. The minister of fisheries, who is travelling in Atlantic Canada, will be talking to me again tonight. We hope to move forward and respond to this very real problem that is hurting all the fishing families in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Brian Tobin (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte): Mr. Speaker, members on this side of the House from Newfoundland, indeed members from Atlantic Canada, appreciate that the government has put assistance programs in place in 1990 and 1991. Federal governments going back over 10 years have had to assist the Atlantic fishing industry on occasion.

I want to make clear to the Prime Minister what the families are asking for now. What they are saying is that they understand that whatever action must be taken to rebuild those stocks must be undertaken no matter what the cost, including the cost to families. Until such time as the long-term plan is put in place, as it must be, and until such time as long-term compensation measures are worked out, as we are confident they will be, in the interim, just to sustain the basics of life, to put bread and butter on the table, can Atlantic fishing families, in particular in Newfoundland and Labrador, expect this government to intervene to provide them with some economic assistance soon, now if possible?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I think my friend quite properly divides the problem in two. The long-term problem will partly be resolved as a result of the UNCED conference in Rio and other long-term initiatives to revive the cod stocks off Newfoundland and Labrador. That is certainly a long-term problem. I think we are in general agreement that the minister of fisheries, for example, did a tremendous job in Rio in regard to the protection of the interests of Newfoundland and Labrador.

With regard to the more immediate problem, as we know Rick Cashin is chairing a task force in regard to the specific problem. The minister of fisheries and the member for St. John's East have been making specific recommendations to the government as to how the Government of Canada can assist the fishermen and the communities in the short term, which I think is the problem raised by my hon. friend.

The record indicates that when the people of Newfoundland and Labrador needed assistance this government, the Government of Canada, did not fail to respond. I am waiting to hear from the minister of fisheries in regard to his ideas. When he has a specific program I am satisfied that the government will respond in a fair and I think helpful way to the fishermen of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. George S. Baker (Gander—Grand Falls): Mr. Speaker, yesterday a Newfoundland inshore fisherman from Fogo Island, Mr. Larry Donahue, trying hard to catch fish, watched helplessly as 50 of his nets were dragged up and destroyed by a factory trawler from France in the northern cod zone.