

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

this. It is determined to do everything in its power to prevent destruction by pollution and overfishing as well as by undue exploitation the life-giving resources of our coastal seas.

On the other hand, the government is also aware of its responsibilities as a member of the international fishing community. It is anxious to achieve its objectives in a spirit of co-operation with its neighbours wherever possible. During the past two years, as the hon. member himself just outlined, the government has taken various steps to correct some of the wrongdoings which have taken place in the past, as well as some of the mismanagements of the past in the hope of arriving at better international agreements regarding the management of the fisheries.

The government of Canada has drawn base lines from headland to headland, has established a 12-mile territorial sea limit and has established closing lines to close off large bodies of water such as the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the Bay of Fundy for the exclusive use of Canadian fishermen. All this was done on Canada's own initiative. The government at present is also in the process of phasing out from our exclusive fishing areas countries which have had traditional fishing practices there. Also, it has initiated a series of negotiations which should bear fruit in the very near future.

Hon. members will recall that the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Sharp) stated in the House on September 27 that we are making very rapid and satisfactory progress on a treaty with the French government which will cover a number of these matters. The government further intends to discuss with fishing countries the question of the management of this resource on the whole of our continental shelf and the practices necessary for a sustained yield harvesting of the fisheries resource. The minister announced recently that he hoped to convene next year a meeting of all international fishing nations of the world in order to discuss this very important subject.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member referred to the recent visit of the Premier of the Soviet Union and the role that Canada played at that time to bring to the attention of our neighbour to the north our great concern about the overfishing of the fisheries. Answering a question put to him in the House by the hon. member for South Shore (Mr. Crouse), the minister said that we have not failed to reach an understanding with the U.S.S.R., that we have made various submissions and that we hope we will be able to carry out our points and get the U.S.S.R. to agree to our proposals.

• (10:10 p.m.)

GRAIN—LIFT PROGRAM—REPAYMENT REQUESTS TO FARMERS—REFERENCE TO LEGAL OFFICERS OF GOVERNMENT

Mr. A. P. Gleave (Saskatoon-Biggar): Mr. Speaker, I raise this question this evening because I have not been able to obtain satisfactory information. On October 13 I asked a question of the minister in charge of the Wheat Board (Mr. Lang) in regard to certain letters sent to farmers demanding repayment of moneys which they were paid under the Lift program. On November 1, I again asked a question with regard to the legal aspects of the matter. I asked whether the individual cases of farmers

[Mr. Corbin.]

were examined by counsel in the Department of Justice or in any other department of government before repayment was demanded by letter. I would like the answers tonight.

I would like to know how many letters were sent out by the department demanding repayment. I would like to know how much money in total has been demanded from farmers. I would like to know how much research was undertaken in each case before letters were written demanding money. From time to time I return to my constituency. Last weekend I attended a meeting where I met a number of farmers. Some came to me saying, "I have been asked for so much money. I have received a letter demanding repayment. What shall I do?" They do not know the basis upon which they are asked for repayment.

I am sorry that the minister is not in the chamber tonight. The Lift program was hastily put together. We know that through necessity the government may have hired people who were inexperienced and asked them to undertake supervision of the program. But to demand from a farmer that he repay money on the basis of an aerial photograph, showing this or that in regard to his farm, is just not right.

To demand repayment from a farmer because in the opinion of the people concerned in the department he had not cut a cover crop as of a given day, even though extensions had been publicly granted that summer, is not right. To demand money from a person under these circumstances is not right. It is not right to send a letter to such an individual asking him to sign what in effect is a promissory note to undertake eventual payment of the amount demanded.

The minister responsible should rise in this House on motions and explain what is happening. We should be given answers, but we are not getting them. The hon. member for Meadow Lake (Mr. Cadieu) also asked for answers on this subject. I do not know what he got but I know what I got. I sincerely hope that this evening we will receive some worth-while answers.

Mr. Marcel Lessard (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, a few days ago on behalf of the minister I provided some information that was requested by the hon. member for Meadow Lake (Mr. Cadieu). The hon. member who has just spoken has asked for more information. I regret that I am not in a position to give him a complete answer right now but I would say to him that one of the main aims of Operation Lift was quickly to provide co-operating prairie farmers with some much needed cash. To achieve this, cheques covering an initial payment were sent out to producers following a quick examination of their applications. Later, a more detailed examination was carried out, and in those cases where it was evident that an overpayment had been made the producer was advised of the discrepancy and a return of the overpayment was requested.

It was originally estimated that about 4,168 overpayments had been made, and to date more than 888 producers have replied to the request. Of these, more than 528 have returned the overpayment and more than 360 have provided further explanation which has justified their original payment.