

Oral Questions

was for PSP, but there was a toxic agent, a dinoflagellate or something there, that, when it was injected into those mice, killed every one. It is very serious when there is a 100 per cent kill.

Does the Minister not think with that type of evidence, never mind this testing of epidemiology and going around and surveying to see how many people are sick, but with the lab results alone, that this evidence was certainly strong enough in every way it was looked at, that the Minister should have been informed, and the Minister should have acted and taken the mussels off the shelves in wholesalers and in restaurants, and alerted people to the serious danger of this toxin, regardless of what the toxin was in these mussels?

Hon. Jake Epp (Minister of National Health and Welfare): I think, Mr. Speaker, that the hon. gentleman puts forward a case which I have looked at and have put forward as well in the sense of the testing that was taking place and the medical evidence.

The Member mentions that six out of six was conclusive proof. Obviously in the minds of scientists and Dr. Todd at the time, that was not enough scientific proof to send that message up the chain of command. Obviously, it was not.

I am saying to the hon. gentleman, and I am not trying to be personal in any way, he knows as a former Fisheries Minister how anyone would want to, from a scientific point of view, get the best information, and Dr. Todd, on the Friday, obviously was not convinced to send the information up the chain in terms of the information that he had.

MINISTERIAL RESPONSIBILITY—ISSUANCE OF PUBLIC WARNING

Mr. George Henderson (Egmont): Mr. Speaker, there is no other way to look at it but as extremely serious. The Minister has to take responsibility for his departmental officials. That is recognized as with any Minister of the Crown of the Government of Canada, or any provincial Minister. The buck stops at the Minister's desk. People were sick. The mussel industry itself, until we find the problem, is going to be devastated, and the more people who get sick, the more devastation for the industry, and it should have been stopped forthwith. It should have been stopped on Friday night.

I ask the Minister if he does not agree that it should have been stopped on Friday night, or certainly Saturday morning, and at the very latest when the stop order was issued for shipment of mussels from Prince Edward Island, that it should have been followed up immediately simultaneously with a stop order for the sale of mussels in every wholesaling unit and every retail outlet in Canada?

Hon. Jake Epp (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I tried to answer that as well, and I went back, for example, to the fact whether the Department should have informed earlier, or whether the communication should be different, or whether the Department should not rely, for

example, quite as heavily on the evidentiary link that we have talked about here.

What I say to the Hon. Member, as I said to the Leader of the NDP, for example, that yes, obviously I am going to look at every procedure, every scientific procedure and see how we can improve it. But I say to the hon. gentleman as well that whatever improvement can be made, it will be made. But I want him to understand, as I say, as a former Fisheries Minister, what the procedures were, because he relied on them equally in order both to protect human life, which is my job—that is my job, and I don't pass the buck, it stops at my desk—but I say to him as well that it is not as clear as he would like to characterize it on the Friday, which he used in his question.

ISSUANCE OF STOP SHIPMENT ORDER

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton—Melville): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of National Health and Welfare. As I understand it on the Friday of the tests where six out of six mice died, those were tests on mussels that were already on the market. Two days later the Ministry issued a "stop shipment" order on mussels that were not even tested.

I want to know from the Minister why they issued a "stop shipment" order on mussels that were not tested, but did not warn the public about the poisonous mussels that were already on the market and being consumed by Canadians in restaurants and elsewhere.

Hon. Jake Epp (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I can go through the chronology again on the Saturday and Sunday, but possibly for preservation of time, I won't.

What I say to the Hon. Member is that the "stop shipment" order is a containment order, namely, that mussels or any other product does not get on the market until the Department has got the evidence that it needed. That is why the order on Sunday, that was in the judgment of the Department. As they got the evidence, they made that evidence available to me, and I acted.

ISSUANCE OF PUBLIC WARNING—MINISTER'S POSITION

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton—Melville): Mr. Speaker, even Dr. Todd with his tremendous experience in this field appears to have had second thoughts about what has happened.

I wonder if the Minister, on reviewing the evidence, may now have some second thoughts, and whether or not he will admit in this House that he should have issued a warning to the public two or three days before he actually did.

Hon. Jake Epp (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I think it comes back to the point that I quoted of Dr. Todd, that all of us will look at procedures again. But I say to the hon. gentleman, he's been in this House a long period of time, I think he would give, whether it is a Minister or any Member of the House, at least the ability to make a