

Adjournment Debate

As I suggest, there cannot be anybody left in this country who does not know that this is the case, that the fish are being pillaged by foreign overfishing and that men and women are being put out of work right, left and centre through no fault of their own.

If we are going to correct this situation two lines of attack are required.

First and foremost, or else nothing else matters in so far as this subject is concerned, we have to find a way to stop the rape of the fish stocks off the coast of Newfoundland. We have to do it. There is no time left. It has to be done now.

That is why that armada of seven trawlers at this very moment is making its way out to the nose and tail of the Grand Banks. We have to send a message to the world community that this overfishing, this pillaging, this wanton rape of the fish stock has to stop and it has to stop now.

Second, the government has to lend a helping hand to those who depend on that resource for their livelihood. They are the men and women on the south and south-west coast of Newfoundland and elsewhere in Newfoundland, the men and women in parts of Nova Scotia who also depend on that resource. The government has to find a way to help these people bridge the gap. Not in the context of handouts. The reason these people are not working today is not because they are lazy; it is because they cannot find any fish to catch.

Today, just for the moment or so left to me, I want to talk about that second element, the need to help those who, through no fault of their own, are without a source of income: the fishermen, the trawlermen, the inshore fishermen, the plant workers, the men and women who cut, split and package the fish for market.

That is what I was talking about last December when I raised with my friend, the Minister of Employment and Immigration, the issue of unemployment insurance as it affects those people.

I appealed to him in particular to review the program's guidelines. When I say the program, I have in mind the Atlantic Catch Failure Program itself. I asked him to take into account that the program, as well intentioned as it might be, was not meeting the need that it was intended to meet, that whole populations of people were being excluded on technicality and technicality does not buy groceries.

Those people, first of all, want to work. In the absence of work, work which has been snatched out from under them, they ought to be given a helping hand. That helping hand ought to be given in a fair way.

As an example, let me use the gear-up program that the minister of fisheries announced some weeks ago. That had a good objective. But whoever came up with the rules must have sat down and said: "How can I make this as unfair as possible?" Mr. Speaker, if you have ever seen anything as warped in your life as those regulations, I challenge you to show me.

There are people being excluded just in terms of where they live along the coast, not in terms of how bad a fishing season they had.

My appeal to the government is to use the resources available to it to give some help to those people. It should do it in a way that is fair, so those people are not left out on technicalities, so those people are helped to put bread and butter on the table until they can get back to doing what they really want to do in the first place and that is to go out there, catch some fish and prepare it for market.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre H. Vincent (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the Atlantic fisheries emergency assistance program, announced on October 4, 1991, was based on a particularly set of circumstances. Many people who would normally have taken part in the coastal fishery during the summer of 1991 were not able to do so or hardly caught anything at the local level. There was a lot of ice and the consequent cold temperatures translated into poor landings of cod and capelin.

This special program provided funds for the creation of jobs and specified the eligibility criteria. Those criteria were necessary in order to make sure that the program benefited those for whom it was created, namely the fishermen and the plant workers that have been depending on fish for a long time and that did not fish for a sufficient number of weeks during the summer of 1991 to be eligible for unemployment insurance benefits.

In the Atlantic region, 249 job creation projects have translated into more than 41,000 weeks of employment for 5,864 fishermen and plant workers. This assistance was mainly provided in Newfoundland, where 4,092 fishermen and plant workers participated in more than 100 job creation projects. The projects undertaken in