

time, probably five years. We feel that one enforcement agency on the rivers of the Atlantic provinces would be more effective in enforcing conservation and in dealing with poachers.

[Translation]

INQUIRY WHETHER GOVERNMENT WILL SOON ANNOUNCE
DECISION ON COMPENSATION FOR SALMON FISHERMEN

Mr. Rémi Bujold (Bonaventure-Îles-de-la-Madeleine): Mr. Speaker, my question is also directed to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans. Coming back to the statement he made yesterday about compensation for salmon fishermen, I would like to point out to the minister that it is extremely important for most of our fishermen because it is, indeed, the only way they can make their living. Can the minister tell us whether he will soon announce his decision on this matter, because of the uncertainty that is being created for fishermen? Further, can he ensure that before he takes his decision he will consult with the fishermen involved? And in case he decides to terminate this compensation program, what will happen to the licences granted to these fishermen?

[English]

Hon. James A. McGrath (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): As the hon. gentleman probably knows, the decision as to compensation was taken last year. The compensation program was put in place in 1972 for a five-year period. It was extended to six years, then to seven years, and later to eight years—we are now in the eighth year. Treasury Board announced last year that this was the final year. So a decision has already been made. It is not my decision; it was made last year by Treasury Board. With respect to the position of those who are currently receiving compensation, I am having discussions with my hon. friend from Saint John and we shall be dealing with cases on their individual merits. However, the hon. member might be interested to know that 6 per cent of those now receiving compensation are over 80 years of age and that almost 20 per cent are over 70 years of age.

[Translation]

CATCH LIMITS—INQUIRY WHETHER MINISTER WILL CONSULT
PROVINCES AND SPORTS FISHING ASSOCIATIONS

Mr. Rémi Bujold (Bonaventure-Îles-de-la-Madeleine): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is directed to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and it deals with sports fishing. Since he said that he might set more restrictive limits to sports fishing catches in rivers, can he tell us if he has had consultations with the provincial governments and fishing associations on this subject and, if not, does he intend to follow the open policy of his government and consult them before taking a decision?

Oral Questions

● (1150)

[English]

Hon. James A. McGrath (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Speaker, the limits on the rivers will be established by zone management committees which will be put in place and which will work under the Salmon Board for the Atlantic provinces. It will probably vary from river to river. Some rivers might be closed next year, and there will be some rivers where there will be a maximum limit. This will vary from river to river and from zone to zone.

COMPENSATION PROGRAM FOR FISHERMEN

Hon. Roméo LeBlanc (Westmorland-Kent): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the minister would not want to mislead the House. The fact is that last year Treasury Board officials indicated that compensation should not go on forever, but I never felt that that was a binding decision on the ministries of the government.

I should like to ask the minister a question. Since the removal of compensation is not met by a formula that would allow those who are not to continue receiving compensation and who had consistently been led to believe that some day they would return to a commercial fishery, and since the program does not seem to deal with this situation, has the minister done one of two things? Has he approached the provinces that are getting income from the sale of sports licences to see if they would buy out the commercial fishermen, including some of those to whom the minister referred as elderly—will they be dealt with fairly by the provinces—or will the minister put together some kind of program that will not leave those who thought they would return to a commercial fishery to find the door closed forever?

Hon. James A. McGrath (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Speaker, it is my advice that the Treasury Board indicated quite clearly that this was to be the last year of the compensation program, this current fiscal year. I stand by that. I am sure that if the hon. gentleman searched his own memory, he would find that that is, in fact, correct.

With regard to the compensation program and those who will no longer receive compensation after this fiscal year, it is my intention, after consultation with the members of Parliament who are involved, and more particularly with my friend, the hon. member for Saint John, since the Saint John River is one of the principal areas affected, to work out some kind of system whereby these fishermen can be involved in a lucrative fishery. But that would require examining each individual case of the some 400 cases that are currently receiving compensation and have been receiving it for the past eight years.

Mr. LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I find it quite astonishing that the fishermen, especially those who have traditionally fished in Miramichi, would suddenly find that the hon. member for Saint John, as distinguished as he may be personally but whose knowledge of the fisheries is, I think, somewhat limited, should become the agent to defend the interests of the fishermen in