

Oral Questions

He will be aware that the very first recommendation of the Harris panel on northern cod suggests that as a matter of urgency there ought to be an immediate reduction in fishing mortality and that the effects of that recommendation would be to bring the catch effort down as low as 87,000 metric tons by 1992, as compared to 197,000 now.

If the government is prepared to endorse and implement that recommendation, what does it have in mind in so far as the terrible conditions that will prevail for the fishermen and plant workers involved? What initiatives will be taken to protect these people if that recommendation is implemented?

Hon. John C. Crosbie (Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, I believe the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans has stated that he shares the view of Dr. Harris and his panel that the northern cod stock is in decline and that unless steps are taken the whole fishery will be affected.

He has also stated that the total allowable catch with respect to northern cod will remain this year at 197,000 tonnes, which is a 69,000 tonne reduction as compared to two years ago. The minister will have to make a decision this coming fall with respect to what reduction may be necessary for purposes of conservation in view of the present situation. He will have to make that decision this fall in light of the information that is then available, including information that will be made available from expanded and increased research efforts out on the fishing grounds, to try to get more and better information on just state of the fish stocks.

I can only say that the minister understands the seriousness of the situation and will be making a very careful decision based on all information available next fall with respect to the year 1990-91. With respect to those affected by any such decision, there is already a \$130 million program in effect. I will not go into the details, but the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans will be announcing further steps to assist those who are having difficulties as a result of this situation within the next week or so.

Hon. Roger C. Simmons (Burin—St. George's): Mr. Speaker, also in the same report Dr. Harris and his people recommend that the government seek international agreement to permit Canada's management of the

fish stocks on the entire Canadian continental shelf and, failing that, take unilateral action to acquire management rights.

This is the latest group. Last week it was the Fisheries Council. The Liberal caucus has been saying it to the minister for many months in this House and outside. The minister's good buddy, Dick Cashin, and the union have been saying it for a year or two as well.

How many times has the government to be told of the wisdom of taking this particular action? Would it finally take the advice of Dr. Harris, get on with the job, and get the foreigners out of the way so we can have some fish for our own people?

Hon. John C. Crosbie (Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, the hon. gentleman knows that is a very simplistic question. He also knows that the government that preceded ours and was in office for some 20 years, a very long period of time, took the position that it could not take unilateral action to extend jurisdiction, even to extend the 12-mile limit and certainly not to go beyond 200.

Unilateral action on our part would not be observed by other nations of the world. It would be completely useless and, not only that, extremely damaging to Canada. We are pursuing all avenues available to us under international law, including conferring with other coastal states to see if we can have recognized in international law the rights of the coastal state over straddling stocks.

We are going to have a renewed, reinvigorated and expanded campaign to try to persuade Spain, Portugal and the European Community to observe the NAFO quotas this year. That is a continuing campaign. There are two meetings this week to pursue that.

We are going to continue with all means at our disposal to see that these objectives are realized, both the ones that Dr. Harris wants and that we want.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fernand Robichaud (Beauséjour): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister responsible for fisheries, or I should say who is still answering for fisheries.

The Harris report talks of extending fishing zones and foreign overfishing, but also mentions things the government could do now like banning fishing during the spawning period, better surveillance and protection and,