

other duties the Department of Fisheries and Oceans must ensure that fish bought by Canadians is fit for human consumption.

Yesterday the CBC English network reported that the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, disregarding the advice of his officials, allowed the sale of canned tuna fish unfit for human consumption.

This prompted his colleague the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs to issue a warning advising Canadian consumers not to buy that canned tuna fish which was eventually taken off the market.

Does the Leader of the Government in the Senate have any comments to make about this CBC report?

[English]

**Hon. Duff Roblin (Leader of the Government):** Honourable senators, I took notice of the report that my honourable friend refers to and I have an inquiry outstanding with the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to find out what he has to say about it. When I receive that information, I shall be glad to tell my honourable friend about it.

## AGRICULTURE

### WESTERN CANADA—DROUGHT CONDITIONS—GOVERNMENT ACTION

**Hon. Hazen Argue:** Honourable senators, I would like to direct a question to the Leader of the Government in the Senate. It is a follow-up question to the question I put to the deputy leader yesterday. As the government leader well knows, parts of western Canada are faced with a drought and a grasshopper infestation, the worst in the past 50 years. It is also a fact that many farmers and their families are exceedingly short of money to meet current obligations—in many instances to buy necessary food, winter clothing and school books. It is a desperate situation out there. Many meetings have been held to discuss what can be done. I have been to 15 of them. Just an hour ago I received a telephone call asking me to come, along with representatives of the three political parties, to speak to a mass rally tomorrow evening in Stoughton, Saskatchewan.

My question is this: Can the minister assure those people that there will soon be an announcement by the government dealing with the major request by the farm organizations that there be paid to grain producers in the drought area the sum of \$50 per seeded acre? This request is supported by many organizations and the support is virtually unanimous.

**Hon. Duff Roblin (Leader of the Government):** I acknowledge the force of my honourable friend's observations about the drought and grasshopper devastation in parts of western Canada. I do not know whether it comforts anybody but, thank God, so far it is limited in its area as compared to what happened in the 1930s. My province of Manitoba, northern Saskatchewan and northern Alberta have emerged well and are in pretty fair shape. However, that does not in any way take away from the problems mentioned by my honourable

friend. He knows, of course, that the crop insurance plan—and I am rather proud that my province was the first to implement it—is paying out some \$500 million this year to assist in the problem. I am sure that he knows that \$48 million has been provided for the livestock producers and that there has been a moratorium or freeze on foreclosures under the federal farm credit organization system. Initial steps have been taken, but that is not to say that more help is not required.

The government has an emergency task force in the field at the present time. No doubt it is acquainting itself with the sentiments of meetings such as that to which my honourable friend has referred. I expect that the emergency task force will have finished its assessment of the nature of the problem and will have formulated its advice as to the things which should be done to help out, hopefully—which is a word I shall use more often these days—by the end of this month or certainly as soon as possible. When that happens the government will be able to make its final decision. I know that two weeks is a long time in the psychological atmosphere that surrounds those people at risk in the areas involved. I think it is important to have a clear understanding of the best possible solution to the problem, rather than going off with less than a perfect plan.

**Senator Argue:** Honourable senators, I was hoping for a more definitive statement than the one just given by the Leader of the Government. It sounds to me like a postponement of a decision for an undue length of time, because if the task force report is not ready until the end of the month, goodness knows how long it will take the cabinet to deal with the matter and to make an announcement.

As far as the severity of the drought is concerned, it covers about half of Saskatchewan and about half of Alberta. It is a major catastrophe, as indicated by the request of a very responsible organization, the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, that there be an infusion of money totalling as much as \$500 million.

I ask the minister once again: When does he think an announcement will be made? I can tell him what turns on this money. It is not only the lot of the individual farmer, which is the main concern, but there are business people going bankrupt every day. They need to know if their customers or their accounts receivable may be met to a reasonable extent through such an announcement. I would ask the Leader of the Government to be a little more definitive. Following his reply, I will have a supplementary question on the state of the livestock industry in western Canada.

**Senator Roblin:** I wonder if my honourable friend heard my observation that some \$500 million will be available through the crop insurance system.

**Senator Argue:** I heard.

**Senator Roblin:** That is not to be sneezed at; it is a substantial contribution. Of course, part of this is paid by the farmers, and the remaining parts by the provincial and federal governments. I do not overlook the fact that it is an insurance program to which the farmers have contributed, but it proves, in my opinion, the value of it.