

*Supply*

lines of communication between the Minister and his officials are somewhat blurred and could be improved.

There is trouble between the fishermen and officials of the Minister's Department. However, it must be clearly understood, Sir, that it is not the fishermen who started the trouble. From discussions I have held with the fishermen and their wives, as well as from the large number of letters I have received from fishermen and from their wives in my constituency, it is obvious, at least to me, that the fishermen in this area have been unreasonably provoked and harassed. A 62-year old lobster fisherman, with whom I spoke on the telephone, has fished for 45 years of his life. He told me that this is the first time that trouble of this nature has occurred along the South Shore.

The fishermen have been provoked, laughed at and harassed for over a year by federal fisheries inspectors. These inspectors have cut off their buoys, taken their traps, snarled and cut their lines and left them with absolutely nothing. The fishermen tried to reason, they tried to talk, they tried to rationalize with the officers, all to no avail. The plastic tags for the lobster pots, which are something new in 1983, in place of the metal tags which were nailed to the pots previously, plus the lack of replacement tags, is one of the items at the root of the dispute. It sounds simple to you, Sir, and it is simple to me. However, when you have officers who do not seem to understand that these plastic tags can be lost and are fining the fishermen, this becomes a major problem.

As I understand the problem, all these men are asking for is the right to make a living. They are not pirates. They are not criminals. They are not Mafia types. They are not ruffians. They are hard working, Christian, family men who have been provoked beyond all reason. They have been trying for a lengthy period of time to get through to someone within the Department who will listen to reason, someone with common sense. But this, obviously, does not seem possible. They diligently tried to stop the harassment before someone was killed, but instead of reasoning with these men the Department put five more boats in the area and armed its patrol officers with shotguns.

Does anyone in this House really believe that this is the proper course to follow when dealing with Canadian fishermen? If they do, Sir, then I say to this House that the Government is unaware of the facts and that it is turning a blind eye and a deaf ear to the pleas of Canadians who, in desperation, under severe provocation, broke the law and destroyed the two patrol boats which symbolized their misery and frustration.

This type of action, of course, is related to the very motion we have before us, because it affects the productivity of my people. I would like to tell the House what some of my constituents have had to say. Throughout all of some 50 or more letters plus phone calls which I have received, I find the same thread of reason. This is only one of some 50 letters I have available. It was sent to me and it reads as follows:

Dear Sir:

I am a resident of Woods Harbour and also a fisherman's wife. I am writing to show my concern over the situation here in this community. So far nine of our men have been arrested on piracy charges and even as I am writing this letter they are arresting more. I am appalled at the justice system in this country. Only one side of the story has been told. The Department of Fisheries side. Every attempt of the fishermen to settle this matter in a peaceful manner has been turned down. Their last resort was the destruction of two boats leased to the D.F.O. If this hadn't happened it would have been lives instead of boats. This is where the situation was headed.

I would like to see a full scale federal investigation take place.

Since the beginning of the lobster season the D.F.O. have been hauling and seizing traps, from this area, tagged or not. Woods Harbour area was hit the hardest. The morning the D.F.O. boats were destroyed, the D.F.O. were armed and willing to challenge the men to a game of cops and robbers. They were given permission to shoot. The fishermen had no defence. Which would the justice system rather see? The loss of two boats which can be replaced or the loss of many lives which cannot.

The fishermen were provoked beyond endurance. They are hard working men trying to support themselves and their families. The D.F.O. is trying to enforce a law 15 years old, which should have been retrieved the year after it went into effect and through neglect on their part failed to do it. The fault lies there.

Now our men are charged with piracy. If they are convicted there is no justice left in this world.

I am begging you to try your best and do something for these men and the situation here in Woods Harbour. We are not pirates. We are honest hardworking people trying our best to make a living. We need help from somewhere.

Yours truly

"Mrs. Gilbert Devine"  
Woods Harbour

The same lady also wrote to the Minister of Fisheries a very short letter, and I quote:

I am a resident of Woods Harbour and a fisherman's wife. I am deeply concerned over the situation here in Woods Harbour. I feel an investigation should be conducted into the D.F.O.'s methods of trap enforcement. The morning of the destruction of the two boats leased by the D.F.O. the RCMP advised them to leave the wharf as they were only antagonizing the situation. The fishermen were challenged to a game of cops and robbers by the D.F.O.

I was extremely upset by your statement against the fishermen. It is apparent you know nothing about what goes on in your department or you wouldn't be so quick to condemn our men. Your people refused to negotiate with our men. You listened with deaf ears and closed minds. You should be thankful it was only two boats lost and not many lives. If anyone should be charged with piracy it's the D.F.O. for removal of legal traps from the water and the destruction of these traps because the proper size boats were not used or the proper equipment. Your sympathies lie in the wrong place. Without the fishermen you wouldn't even have a job.

Yours truly

"Mrs. Gilbert Devine"

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I could place many more letters of that type on the record but I will close with just a few other comments. In view of the comments made by so many of my constituents over a vast area, comments which reflect upon their very lives, their productivity and on Nova Scotia's economy, I wish to endorse the pleas of these fishermen and their wives and families for a full-scale federal investigation not only into what has occurred in West Pubnico but also into the facts concerning the fisheries officials who have apparently been breaking the law for some time through illegal acts against hard working, law abiding Canadians.