

Government Orders

officer will not let their gear stay in the water past the closing time of the season?

I told the fishermen that I was not sure what would happen but I would bring their concerns to the committee hearings and to the House of Commons. On two separate occasions I raised the issue in committee and both times my questions and the questions of my fishermen were not answered.

When we heard the assistant deputy minister, Mr. Haché, before the committee, I asked him if it would follow that at the end of the lobster season the traps, buoys and all would have to be out of the water; if the season ends on Saturday, everything must be removed by Saturday, which the ADM responded, that is correct. Later on, I asked Mr. Haché again, if we have a stormy day on Saturday, unless the fisheries officer desires, the traps would have to come out on Friday. I can see where this would create a problem in the lobster fishery where we come from. We have always had a couple of days, 48 hours, to remove the traps from the water. Again, the ADM responded by saying, "This is correct, Mr. Chairman. There has always been an additional day or two, depending on the weather, for the fishermen to haul their gear at the end of the season".

The government has gone on and on about how this amendment to the bill will allow more flexibility in the removal of gear. Indeed, I must have heard the word hundreds of times from the government in committee. However, fishermen in my riding see this as being anything but flexible. Fishermen say that it leaves them at the mercy of the fisheries officer who may or may not look kindly upon the fishermen. Fishermen are afraid of being put in the position that they can be harassed.

During the committee hearings we heard from witnesses who said that fisheries officers are also being harassed and I agree. There are fisheries officers who are being harassed by fishermen who deliberately break the law. However, there are instances where fishermen are also harassed by fisheries officers.

This clause which says that "a fisheries officer may permit" is just another way for our fishermen to be harassed. The problem is they may or may not permit them to leave their traps in the water for another 48 hours or if it is going to be stormy on the day the season

closes, they could be forced to remove their traps possibly a day early.

It is my belief that the government's amendment to this section of the act is unnecessary. I asked the government officials if there were any problems under the old section, and they did not give me one example. They could not give me an example of any time this 48-hour grace period that our lobster fishermen had in order to have a reasonable amount of time at the end of the season to remove their traps caused difficulties.

Why was this done by the government? There is no answer. I think it could cause a problem for our fishermen. The fisheries officer might decide to give them the time, and he might not. Indeed, most fisheries officers that I deal with, or know, certainly would.

It puts the responsibility on the fishery officer, and the word "may" in the clause is very important: "They may, or they may not."

The official from the department could not point out a case. An old quote says: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." I think this is the situation in this case. There is not a problem, so why do we here in this House create a problem for the lobster fishermen?

This government amendment is unnecessary and unwarranted. The fishermen in my riding say this will limit their flexibility in removing their gear. Of course, it certainly will complicate their flexibility.

My amendment will prevent harassment and provide greater flexibility by restoring the 48-hour time limit for the removal of fishing gear.

I urge the government members, some of whom truly understand how hard the fishermen work and how difficult it is on the sea to not place this extra burden on the fishermen and let's leave the 48-hour time period that we have had over the last number of years and treat our fishermen with respect.

Mr. Brian L. Gardiner (Prince George—Bulkley Valley): Mr. Speaker, I rise very briefly to let you and the House know that our party will be supporting the amendment being proposed by the member for Cardigan.

Mr. Ross Reid (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Speaker, I will be very brief.