

Fishing and Recreational Harbours

When I say "fair share" I mean about 15 per cent. I would like to close my remarks by asking my colleagues in this House to vote in favour of Bill C-2 so that we may give the minister and his officials working tools for the administration and the good management of our fishing and recreational harbours.

● (1532)

[English]

Mr. David MacDonald (Egmont): Mr. Speaker, it is not my intention to detain the House to any great degree on third reading of this bill. I think the position of our party has already been clearly stated by the hon. member for South Shore (Mr. Crouse) with regard to this particular initiative. However, I should like to add a word with respect to the Prince Edward Island fisheries situation because I know the minister has had considerable contact with the fisheries people there, not only with the provincial minister of fisheries but with fisheries organizations in that province.

Although he has not been minister of that department since 1969, the minister is well aware of the fact that since that time the organization and planning of fisheries in P.E.I. has generally been included under the umbrella of the P.E.I. comprehensive development plan. I think it is worth while for all hon. members to reflect on what has happened during that time, a period of some eight years. I say it is important because I think we should learn some lessons from what has happened as a result of the 1969 plan.

Hon. members may recall that the attempt, through the joint plan signed by the Government of Canada and the government of P.E.I., provided an over-all comprehensive planning framework for the various economic sectors in the province. These included sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, tourism, light manufacturing, service, etc. With respect to the fishing sector, and I am here quoting from the plan itself, "the essential strategy must therefore be to assist those fishermen who wish to move to other occupations". That was a kind of fisheries abandonment program. Unfortunately, far too much time and attention have been devoted to this kind of rationalization or, perhaps more accurately, this kind of winding down of the fisheries sector in P.E.I.

I suppose that, from the standpoint of some kind of objective logic, one could accept the initiatives that were being taken at the federal and provincial levels. They looked at the number of fishermen involved in the fisheries industry, they looked at the gross intake of either fish products or income, and they divided one into the other and said it was not possible for a fisherman to sustain himself or his family at that income level. The obvious answer, on a kind of mathematical basis, was to reduce the number of people involved in the fishing industry, assuming the fish stock remained constant.

● (1542)

Perhaps that makes mathematical sense, but that kind of logic could not be applied for a number of very important reasons. One reason is the very nature of the fishing occupation in Prince Edward Island. It is not a trade situation in

[Mr. Cyr.]

which people are regarded as another element in the production factor. Fisheries has been a way of life. As such, that industry was not isolated as if it had no relationship to other forms of activity.

The Minister of Fisheries and the Environment (Mr. LeBlanc) and I share a similar fishing district, district No. 8. Thus I do not have to say the following to him. The situation for many years was one where individual fishermen could fish only for certain periods of the year. That was by reason of the regulation itself. Traditionally our most productive industry had been lobster fishing. Therefore, fishermen had to discover other forms of endeavour or employment. This meant that many fishermen looked upon fishing as a primary way of life and looked upon other forms of activity to support that way of life.

The kinds of activities engaged in by fishermen are too numerous to mention. One could talk about the people who fished and farmed, a stereotype example. On the eastern end of the island, relatives of mine have very naturally combined these two occupations for generations. There was a nice ordering of the seasons, in terms of the preparing of traps, planting, fishing and harvesting. It all fitted into a pattern which made a lot of sense in Prince Edward Island.

Recently fishermen who were not involved in farming turned to other forms of second employment activity. Some turned to the service sector; some were individual entrepreneurs. The list is quite long and extensive. As the approach to the regulation of the fishing industry has become more precision like, if a fisherman did not fall into the precise definition of that category, then he was no longer considered a valid or bona fide fisherman. Quite frankly, the approach taken by the officials in the federal Department of Fisheries and the Environment has concerned me. I see the Minister of Fisheries and the Environment is shaking his head as he reflects on this. I realize he has had similar experiences. I hope I am shoring up the minister's own basic instinct to identify with the way of life in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, rather than that which perhaps is more directly related to commercial operations on factory ships, or in a situation where it is possible to have year round employment and income from a direct involvement in that industry. However, that has not been the case for a very long period of time in Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick.

In attempting to maintain an adequate lobster industry in order to supply sufficient income for those engaged in it, we have been required to point out that there is a limited supply of lobster and a limited return from that industry. Also we have indicated, if we are to make the return sufficient for the capital investment and for the employment activity of the fishermen, that we will have to reduce their numbers.

During the last year there was a specific program entered into with the province of Prince Edward Island, as well as others. It was a buy back program which would reduce the number of people engaged in the lobster industry. I was impressed by the fact that few people seriously objected to implementation of this program, because it has restricted