

Adjournment Debate

Mr. Speaker, you know what my question is going to be and I can tell you what the response is going to be from the hon. parliamentary secretary. The response from the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans is: "Yes, I am aware of what is going on, but we are not ready yet." The people in Newfoundland are ready and the people in my riding are ready.

Let me tell you how ready they are. I represent three Bays: Bonavista Bay, Trinity Bay and Conception Bay. Let me say something about Bonavista Bay. One area trapped, last year, 300,000 pounds, this year 14,000 pounds. That is a tremendous reduction in the same bay. Another area needs a response to assist 150 fishermen and 500 plant workers in Bonavista Bay. Let me talk about Trinity Bay.

In one area in Trinity Bay, as I stand and speak, there are 31 people who have not qualified for unemployment insurance. This is a report from the union.

I have another report here. This concerns Conception Bay, and this is from the CEC office which works directly with the Minister of Employment and Immigration. The number of employees in one area serviced by a CEC office, in a fish plant area, is 3,200.

The number of those who had any weeks at all as of the end of August is 1,600 and only 100 had a total of 10 weeks, that will qualify for unemployment insurance.

What is happening is that we are raising the concerns of our riding, and I am sure people are sympathetic to it but what I am getting is the response from the government. I am not paid to come up here and take back to my riding the response that the government has. I am paid to come up here and to give the position of the people from my riding, who are in dire situations.

I have three cases in which people cannot afford to send their kids to school because they have not got any money, and they have not got any clothes for the children and they do not have money to put food on the table.

I cannot impress upon this House the urgency of this situation. I know the hon. member for Labrador. He is a very moderate man, and he was angry today. He said: "If you do not give it to me now, don't bother." I am sure he did not really mean that but that is the sense of urgency that we are trying to get into this House and into this government.

The hon. Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, whom I believe and hope understands the situation, has to pressure his cabinet colleagues to come up with an aid package now. He said the fishing industry is not finished yet. It is not over.

It is finished for a lot of people and it is going to be finished for a lot of others, even as we stand and speak.

If you cannot come up with a total package, because he claims the fishing industry is not over, come up with a partial package. Aid those who need it now.

These are extraordinary times, and they cannot have a standard solution. They need to have an extraordinary solution. I am asking the minister and his parliamentary secretary to give me a good answer to that and to tell me there is an aid package coming out tomorrow morning.

Mr. Ross Belsher (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency): Mr. Speaker, to the hon. member opposite, I can assure him and the House that officials of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and Employment and Immigration Canada are closely monitoring the situation. They are working on the very problem that he has identified so eloquently here this afternoon.

I can tell the hon. member also that during a recent visit last week the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans met with the premier of Newfoundland, Mr. Wells, and also with Mr. Cashin, President of the Fishermen's Union.

We do realize that many fishermen and plant workers are facing troubling times because they have been able to catch very few fish this season. The severe ice conditions which persisted along the Labrador coast have caused a failure of fish in that area. The conditions along the northeast coast of Newfoundland were somewhat better, but the cold water temperatures resulted in poor capelin and cod fisheries.

For the many industry participants, this is the worst fishing season in recent memory. Inshore ground fishermen and plant workers who rely on the success of this fishery for employment have had their incomes seriously reduced. A comprehensive program of assistance is being developed in co-operation with the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.