The same can be said, of course, for the problems on the east coast.

The cut of $211 million from the budget of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans is something that must be done very carefully, as I suggested earlier.

• (1030)

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans has experienced serious budget cuts over the last two or three years. The effects of those cuts, particularly on the west coast, have been dramatic.

I want to quote the concerns expressed by fisheries officers to the minister on November 2, 1994. The fisheries officers were pointing out the difficulties they have experienced because of budget cuts. They suggested that budget allocations did not provide for the successful delivery of programs and untrained staff members were not able to carry out enforcement controls. The monitoring of the catch was affected and so on.

Three months before the opening of the 1994 fishery season, senior fisheries officials on the west coast were warning of a disaster if the level of enforcement was further downgraded. I will quote from a report by R.K. Carson, area manager, Fraser River division. He says:

> The impact of a further—cut will have significant ramifications on the success of the implementation of the AFS agreements along the Fraser River. The reduced level of fishery officers and fishery guardians—will result in non–compliance with terms and conditions of agreements, licences, regulations and loss of control of this fishery. The resource will suffer and we could have another repeat of the 'missing sockeye' problems that occurred in the 1992 season.

That is exactly what happened.

In a report by D. Aurel, chief, conservation and protection, New Westminster, it was noted as well that budget cuts would reduce the free trade officer's allotment in the fisheries. He points out that:

> —a 1993 investigation into the illegal export of two million pounds of chum salmon has resulted in 15 charges pending against one fish processing company. These types of serious FTA violations cannot be investigated by one officer alone.

The list goes on. However, when we cut in a department like fisheries we must do it with care.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maurice Dumas (Argenteuil—Papineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to speak this morning to the amendment proposed by the hon. member for Saint–Hyacinthe—Bagot. This debate on Bill C–76, on provisions to implement certain changes in the 1995–96 Budget that will affect transfers to the provinces, concerns all Canadians and Quebecers.

I would like to start with a short summary of the major changes introduced by the 1995–96 Budget, after which, as the official opposition's representative for seniors organizations, I will try to show what the federal government has in mind with its plan to reduce old age pensions in 1997.

Transfers to the provinces are not changed by the 1995–96 budget. Today, there are three main transfer programs: Established Programs Financing, $21.73 billion; equalization, $8.87 billion; and the Canada Assistance Plan, $7.95 billion. The federal budget did not make any changes in the equalization program but it has extended the ceiling provision for equalization for a period of five years.

Section 48 in Bill C–76 will deprive Quebec of $650 million in 1996–97. Bill C–76 proposes new national standards for health care and provides for establishing new national standards for social assistance and post–secondary education. This new federalism does not decentralize at all. These national standards will restrict the autonomy of the provinces in their own jurisdictions.

The government is trying to minimize the significance of these cuts, although they are in fact devastating for the provincial governments, especially for Quebec. The government includes tax point transfers in its figures on cuts in transfer payments to the provinces. The federal government has no control over tax transfers paid to the provinces under its main transfer programs.

• (1035)

In fact, all financial transfers, cash transfers paid to the Government of Quebec, will be reduced by 32 per cent between 1994–95 and 1997–98, as a result of cuts in transfers to the provinces.

A sovereign Quebec would lose federal transfer payments but recover the $30 billion in taxes Quebecers are now paying to the federal government.

The latest budget cuts implemented by Bill C–76 will hit the most vulnerable in our society. The Quebec Minister of Finance estimates that these cuts and transfers to the provinces will reduce the federal contribution to social programs funding from 37.8 per cent to 28.5 per cent between 1994–95 and 1997–98. The federal government is intervening in areas that are under provincial jurisdiction and may make additional cuts in the cash portion of transfers to the provinces.

As the official opposition's representative for seniors organizations, I am very concerned about the old age pension reform announced by the government, which will become effective in 1997. In 1994, they said a document would be tabled very shortly, but the government has delayed production of this document, preferring to wait until after the referendum in Quebec.

In fact the government announced that the most disadvantaged seniors will not lose any protection. This means that the pensions of those defined as having high incomes will be reduced and that the reductions in their pensions will not go to raising the pensions of low income seniors, who have only the