

Supply—Fisheries

question of the seal fishery along the Atlantic coast.

I do not intend to be repetitive, but as the minister is probably quite aware some of the discussion that came about it partly due to the coincidence of many members receiving in the mail an article dealing with this subject, which the minister said in an earlier comment was not altogether accurate.

The article which I have is authored by someone called Brian Davies. I have no knowledge of this gentleman or of his authority or competence to make the statements he does make, but two of the statements he makes in this article run directly counter to statements made by the minister and by officers of his department before the fisheries committee, and I should like to make reference to them. Because these statements are being made and are being circulated, I certainly think we should give the minister and his officials the opportunity to make some reply, at least for our own information in raising questions with him.

I will briefly quote the two statements, which are as follows:

● (4:30 p.m.)

Will the seals gobble up all the fish in the Gulf of St. Lawrence?

I read further:

There is absolutely no scientific evidence to substantiate this claim and the fisheries department has now admitted this lack of evidence, and, it is to be hoped, have stopped circulating the article in question. Surely any grade ten student knows that no predator eats all of its prey, but that a natural and healthy balance is maintained between the two, providing man, the great destroyer of his environment, does not upset this balance of nature.

The minister suggested earlier today that there is a necessity to control the seal population, but he made nothing more than an assertion. It seems to me we should have something more concrete in this regard. It raises in my mind this question: If the seal population would eat up all the fish if it were not controlled, how is it that when Europeans first arrived on this continent, when there had been no seal killing, they found that the waters were teeming with fish? These questions will have to be answered in all seriousness either today by drawing to our attention published evidence, at a later time by a statement on motions, or by way of some published document. These questions should be properly and scientifically answered. The second question, which has not been touched

on today but was the subject matter of comment and discussion in the fisheries committee, is the following:

A suggestion has also been made that the harp seal is a carrier of the worm that affects codfish. Again, we find government officials now admit that there is no real scientific evidence that this is so.

Mr. Robichaud: That is not true.

Mr. Barnett: I continue:

Indeed, evidence presently available tends to point to the harbour seal and the grey seal as the chief carriers of cod-worm. These animals have an entirely different life cycle to the harp seal and the hood seal. At any rate, it is logically confusing to justify the slaughter of harp seals as some kind of control for cod-worms. Cod-worm is in the Gulf, and to eliminate it, if this is possible, which I doubt, requires the elimination of all seals, especially the grey seal, a proven carrier. The government seems unwilling to do this, however, since the grey seal, which had been hunted down to low numbers, is now protected.

That is a pretty blanket sort of statement and it certainly runs counter to information that was given to the fisheries committee. Again, Mr. Chairman, I feel that the minister should make a definite statement on this question from the scientific point of view, draw the attention of the committee to evidence that may have been published on this subject and to which we may refer, or should have prepared a suitable document which will give in an understandable way the scientific evidence which exists on whether this kind of statement has any foundation in fact. These questions are not related to the earlier discussion, but in view of the fact that they are being asked and this type of material is being circulated, they should be answered by the minister either through his departmental officers or the Fisheries Research Board.

Mr. Chairman, I have just one more point to bring to the attention of the committee before resuming my seat. Like the hon. member for Shelburne-Yarmouth-Clare, I am going to ask some assistance from the minister in dealing with another department of the federal government. I am going to leave the Department of Public Works alone but would ask the minister to do something to prod into action the Department of Transport in respect of the manner in which side wharfage charges are levied, at least on the Pacific coast. The Department of Transport has been saying for at least the last two years that under consideration are some changes to the existing system; but nothing has been happening. In