

Honourable senators, I would love to talk fish with you all evening, but I have some regard for your comfort and, perhaps, for my own.

I ask you to look favourably upon this bill. It strikes me as a well-written piece of legislation. I was always taught the difference between good English and legal English. It is an interesting bill. It sets out its aims and its purposes which are to be highly commended. It is a well-structured bill. It has had support in the past from people of different parties and, I believe, from the country as a whole. I was a little sad that so little attention was paid to this when the idea was structured and institutionalized. I could find only one newspaper article about it, and that was carried in the Charlottetown *Guardian*. It was from Mr. John Harbron of Thomson Newspapers. He is the farm policy man. No one else seemed to notice the article. The Senate can take a good look at it, and perhaps make it an approving one.

On motion of Senator Hicks, debate adjourned.

● (2250)

WESTERN GRAIN STABILIZATION ACT

BILL TO AMEND—SECOND READING—DEBATE ADJOURNED

Hon. Martha P. Bielish moved the second reading of Bill C-29, to amend the Western Grain Stabilization Act.

She said: Honourable senators, I have often hauled grain at this hour of the day during harvest, but I never thought that I would have to speak on the Western Grain Stabilization Act at this time of night in the Senate. I welcome the opportunity to speak in favour of the legislation to amend the act. Bill C-29 is one of great importance to western Canada, not just to grain and oilseed producers, but also to the residents of towns and cities across the west, and, in fact, to the economy of the nation as a whole.

I should like to mention two things: Although only 4 per cent of Canada's population are primary producers, one job in ten is generated by the agribusiness sector. Agriculture is important to Canada's balance of trade, consistently making up 10 per cent of export earnings.

The purpose of the Western Grain Stabilization Plan is to stabilize incomes of western grain farmers by protecting them against sharp declines in net cash flow. It was developed during the mid-1970s at a time when the prairie economy was in a recession. The intention of the program was to put money into the hands of farmers at that critical time. Initially the program worked well, and, in theory, it should still work well. However, in practice it has failed to fulfil adequately its mandate, and that can be attributed to some weaknesses in the legislation.

Since the Western Grain Stabilization Plan was introduced in 1976, there have been payouts of \$115 million for 1977, \$253 million for 1978, and \$223 million for the 1983-84 crop year. Yet grain producers have experienced financial difficulty in years in which there was no payout. Even when the program has triggered a payout, the money has always been paid after the year ended.

[Senator Macquarrie.]

Two years ago, some members of the present government asked for amendments to improve the legislation. They wanted to correct a number of problems, including the payout formula, producers' inability to withdraw after three years, and the exclusion of spouses from multiple participation in the program. Furthermore, they wanted to explore the possibility of calculating payments on a regional basis. But in particular they wanted the legislation amended to provide for interim payments. At present the act does not allow for payment until after the end of the crop year.

After much delay, the amending legislation was finally introduced last spring. The government of the day included in the bill some suggestions from across the floor, but ignored others; and because the legislation was brought forward at the last minute, the house committee did not have sufficient time to further improve the act.

It is extremely important that producers receive their payments as early as possible. The greatest need for cash is in the spring when they are planting their crops, and in the summer prior to harvest. An interim payment is a welcome payment indeed. For that reason, it is difficult to understand why the last government brought in legislation permitting an interim payment for only last year.

The legislation before us is intended mainly to amend the act so that interim payments can be made during the crop year and before spring seeding if necessary. Such payments would be authorized so long as they do not involve the risk of overpayment.

The producers' need for cash flow this spring is serious. This amendment would allow for a substantial payment for the 1984-85 crop year to be made before seeding time this spring.

The second amendment contained in the bill is a housekeeping matter. It would retroactively deem all previous orders in council raising the maximum level of grain sale proceeds eligible for levy payments under the act to have been passed, registered and published in the *Canada Gazette* in accordance with the Statutory Instruments Act. This matter is outstanding from 1984 when the act was amended by the previous government. Support was given to the amended legislation last June so that producers would receive a partial payment before harvest.

Honourable senators, we can assume that the reason that many grain producers are still operating is because small local businesses are carrying their accounts. At the same time, we know that a significant percentage of prairie farmers are currently in arrears on their farm mortgages.

The problem of farm financing has been identified as the number one problem facing Canadian agriculture today. Bad weather can take some of the blame for crop producers' problems, but part of the blame must be placed on an inadequate agricultural policy over the past few years.

This government, however, is correcting certain policies and programs and introducing new measures to ease that situation. In November the government announced a rebate on farm