

*Oral Questions*

Some of what has just been said across this Chamber, and I am not now referring to the preamble of the hon. member, by hon. members to each other is clearly unparliamentary and I wish it had not been said. I am not under any circumstances suggesting it was justified.

I am asking hon. members to remember that whether it is a preamble or words that are very personal that will be taken as offensive by the person to whom they are said, that creates disorder in this Chamber and I ask all hon. members to understand the position the Chair is always in.

I would ask the hon. member to rephrase his question and to ensure that the question goes to the administration of the government.

**Mr. Dingwall:** Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister expressed outrage last year he did so with the full support of this member of Parliament as well as many other members of Parliament.

Let the record be very clear. The Prime Minister knows that the remarks which have been attributed to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans are an insult to many of the women in this country.

Will the Prime Minister not now call upon the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to do the honourable thing and to apologize for this insensitive type of remark?

**Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister):** Mr. Speaker, I have indicated to my hon. friend's colleague that for any kind of remark obviously the context has to be full and complete and that all of us from time to time have to be given the benefit of the doubt. We speak off the cuff. Sometimes the media inadvertently picks up one piece of information and leaves some others out in its reporting, which is understandable.

• (1430)

My hon. friend says that the statement attributed to the minister of fisheries was offensive to women. Perhaps in some of the manner in which it was reported, it might have been. That of course I would regret enormously.

For those women who were in the audience, who listened to the whole speech and who took in the full context of it, perhaps I could remind my hon. friend again what they said. Betty Granter of Newfoundland said: "He was nothing like what is being said. He was just

joking as he always does. I think that anybody who is offended by it must have a problem".

Mrs. Stevens said: "I thought it would be damaging if people as a whole thought that sexual harassment was a joke and people did not take it seriously. But that is not the way it was intended and that is not the way the people at the dinner took it".

If the women from Newfoundland who were there and who heard the whole context place the construction on it that I have just conveyed to the House and to my hon. friend, perhaps in fairness to a fellow member of Parliament, he would place an equally appropriate construction on it.

**Mr. David Dingwall (Cape Breton—East Richmond):** Mr. Speaker, the right hon. Prime Minister has made references to statements made by one of the women who attended the gathering.

One of the individuals in question has also said that there has been no sexual harassment in the work place. I want to say to the Prime Minister: that this matter could be rectified quickly and efficiently if the right hon. Prime Minister would reach down and say to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, stand in your place and apologize to the women of Canada for this insensitive remark. Will the Prime Minister do the honourable thing and ask and demand his Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to do that?

**Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister):** Mr. Speaker, the minister of fisheries has already issued a statement of clarification. He has indicated in it very clearly "that those who attended the speech that I made in Lewisporte know that nothing offensive was intended".

He intended to offend no one. The women in his audience agreed with that assessment that no one ought to have been offended by what he said. I understand what my hon. friend is saying. In a hyper-sensitive atmosphere, where vocabulary is very important, my hon. friend will also admit that it is important that the full context be given.

The full context of those remarks indicate that the minister of fisheries, if you will make allowances for his well-known sense of humour about himself, and in this case it was about himself. The context of this sustains the view that he has been throughout his time in public life an ardent and effective defender of the cause of women.