

Freshwater Fish Marketing Act

By any industry measure, the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation is a success. It has shown steady growth and has just completed another year of record sales and record returns to fishermen. The Corporation has consistently generated profits over the past 15 years and has provided fishermen with a level of security that never existed in the past. This is not to say that all fishermen believe the Corporation is perfect. The fact is that even I and other members of the Advisory Committee have questioned the concept of single desk marketing at one time or another. But we did not really understand how the Corporation operates.

Now that we are fully aware of the strengths and benefits of single desk marketing, we have become supporters of the Corporation. This is not to say that we always approve of everything the Corporation does, but there are few issues that we have not been able to work out through reasonable discussion. Like the large majority of fishermen, we believe that while not perfect, the fishing industry in this region has never been in better shape.

Mr. Blanchard went on to state:

As representatives of fishermen across the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation region, we ask that you and other Members of Parliament vote to defeat Bill C-211. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me.

This letter was signed by Annie Bird, La Ronge, Saskatchewan; Helgi Jones, Gimli, Manitoba; Jane Mayo, Yellowknife, Northwest Territories—this is in the Member's own riding who wants to gut the corporation—William Quequish, Weagamow Lake, Ontario. I am from Newfoundland, and I forgive people for mispronouncing some rather famous parts of Newfoundland, so I hope they will forgive me for mispronouncing famous places elsewhere in the country. The letter is also signed by Joe Tsannie, Wollaston Lake, Saskatchewan; Raymond Dupres, Slave Lake, Alberta; Ed Isfeld, Winnipeg Beach, Manitoba; William Cordell, Pikwitonei, Manitoba; Elmo Helgason, Ashern, Manitoba; Bessie Irvine, Grand Marais, Manitoba; and Guy L'Heureux, Jossard, Alberta. I am sure that I mispronounced half of those communities, but it was in total innocence.

The point that I am trying to make is that the reason the Minister of Fisheries has come to his senses and no longer sees behind the doors of the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation the spread, the germ, or the seeds of communism in this country is that he has obviously had an opportunity as Minister of Fisheries to visit some of those communities, or at least to speak to many of those people who are on the Minister's advisory committee. He realizes that one cannot take a few complaints, albeit sometimes legitimate complaints, legitimate proposals, or legitimate aspirations about an industry and the role that a Crown corporation plays in that industry, and use it as justification for wiping out that corporation.

I would urge all Members to defeat this Bill. I urge my good friend and colleague, the Hon. Member for Western Arctic, who represents such a dynamic, interesting, and important part of Canada not to waste the time of the House or his own valuable time with the continued reintroduction year after year of this Bill. It has about as much chance of passing as the Minister has of going back to his old and rather foolish views about the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation.

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina West): Mr. Speaker, I rise to oppose this Bill, and advise my colleague, the Hon. Member for Western Arctic (Mr. Nickerson) that I was here in 1969 when we dealt with this legislation in its origins brought in by a Liberal Government, but Members of Parliament from the Conservative Party, the Social Credit Party, and the NDP supported it.

I have carefully read the speech of the hon. sponsor of this Bill, and I find it passing strange. He tried this in 1985 and he got nowhere, yet he still keeps batting his head against the same wall in spite of the overwhelming support by the massive majority of freshwater fishermen in western and northern Canada and northern Ontario.

I notice that his speech amounts to gutting this legislation. I do not know why he did not move a Private Member's Bill to repeal the whole Act, because that in effect is what his present Bill is doing. But in his speech earlier in the House on this Bill he stated that it would bring about the revival of co-operatives.

I wish to advise my hon. friend that we had a lot of small fishermen's co-operatives. At that time I was representing the constituency of Regina—Lake Centre, and there was a fishermen's co-op on Last Mountain Lake. Members of the co-op lived in places like Dilke, Regina Beach, Chamberlain, and Findlater. They also lived on the other side of the lake at Nokomis, Earl Grey, and places like that.

The trouble they had was not in catching fish, but rather, as a little co-op trying to compete in the international market and the domestic market in central Canada against the large fish dealers, Safeways, and the Hudson's Bay Company. They did not have a prayer. They did not have the resources to compete in the market. They recognized that they needed something in the way of orderly marketing and central desk-selling, to some extent modelled on the Canadian Wheat Board. Since 1935 there has always been a handful of grain producers and grain companies that have tried to undermine, undercut, and destroy the principle of orderly marketing and the Canadian Wheat Board. The same thing applies here.

This is a time to enlarge the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation and give it the tools to do an even bigger job processing plants in the North and in the northern parts of the western provinces.

Mr. Nickerson: Closing them down.

Mr. Benjamin: This is a time to give them the tools on equalizing transportation costs in order that those who are furthest away can get their product to market in central Canada, in the United States, or other parts of the world with some semblance of an equal opportunity and equal competition.

I remember that in 1969 Members of Parliament from northern Canada were citing how, because of transportation costs alone, they had to compete with freshwater fishermen in southern Ontario, southern Quebec and the northern United