

25 avril 1962, Québec

Conseil des pêcheries du Canada

I would like, first of all, to bid you welcome to the capital of our province, and to congratulate you on having chosen Quebec City as the site of the seventeenth annual meeting of the Fisheries Council of Canada. As Prime Minister, and as a resident of the City of Quebec, I am indeed happy to welcome you here, and I have no doubt that your discussions will be crowned with success.

J'ai pris connaissance de votre programme de travail pour les jours qui viennent. J'y ai remarqué un souci évident de couvrir tous les aspects importants de l'industrie qui vous intéresse et d'examiner toutes les solutions possibles aux problèmes auxquels celle-ci fait face.

As you know, several of these problems result from the fact that our country's economy has been developing at an extremely rapid pace for the last few years. I am not an expert in the domain of maritime fisheries, and I would prefer to leave the question of discussing technical problems with you to someone else. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the fishing industry has three important problems to solve, amongst others: the modernization of its equipment, the finding of steady markets and conservation.

If I speak of the modernization of equipment, it is not because this equipment is defective or that it does not suffice for present needs. I only mean to say that insofar as the fishing industry is concerned, perhaps more than for any other industry, it is necessary to improve constantly the methods of production and processing. After all, the fishing industry must be in a state of perpetual evolution. Our country is one of the world's greatest providers of sea food, and furthermore the beginning of our history is intimately linked with the fishing industry. Today, however, it must face competition from many other nations and even from certain ones which come and fish in the proximity of our shores. These nations produce for their own consumption and also with a view to selling their catches to other countries. As Canada exports about two thirds of the production of its fishing industry and also has the United States as its best customer, competition in the international market becomes a serious problem. For this reason, the fishing industry must put forth a serious effort in this quarter, for example by finding new markets, by increasing sales in those markets which it already has, and by encouraging a greater consumption of sea food by the citizens of our own country.

As for conservation, we must remember that even if the sea is an important source of wealth and necessary products, it is not, however, an inexhaustible one. In this sphere, as in the case of any other renewable resource, it is important to rationalize production and to start thinking of protecting the future now; because abuses, in spite of passing gains, always endanger the industry which is guilty of them.

It is not for me to tell you how to reach these objectives; I know that you are exerting yourselves energetically concerning them, and that you will discuss them during your present meeting. Following your studies and meetings, you will certainly find a basis for the solution of these problems. Your Fisheries Council, made up as it is of fishermen's associations,

producers, the questions which I have just mentioned concern the country as a whole, but they also concern Quebec. I will not go so far as to claim that we have found answers to them and that you will learn, during this convention, how the rest of Canada should serve them by following what we are doing here at home. We are, however, very conscious of them and the Government has already adopted certain measures which, we think, will greatly improve the lot of the fishermen and which will also encourage production in their industry.

You probably know that Quebec is the only Canadian province which administers its own maritime fisheries, and this since 1922. This is the reason why our Department of Game and Fisheries has spread out and now is involved in so many different activities. I will not give you a description of its whole organization – I will only point out that it has helped the province's fishermen to modernize their equipment and that it has increased the trade and consumption of fish and other sea produce by educational and advertising campaigns in newspapers and magazines.

Government interest has assisted greatly in the considerable progress made by the fishing industry over the past few years. For a long time, this industry was a family or local type of business which consisted, for the most part, of coastal fishing. However, this type of fishing gradually came to an end because less profitable, and it became necessary to improve the fishing fleet in order to help the fishermen earn their living at their trade. At the same time as the production aid was being improved, ancestral ways of preparing the fish for market were giving way to more modern methods. The demand for both fresh and frozen fish increased greatly and made the provision of modern mechanized processing plants a necessity at the principal unloading points in Gaspé, on the North Shore, and in the Magdalen Islands.

Co-operative enterprise, while increasing the standard of living of the fishermen, has also rendered great service in the processing and marketing of Quebec production. It has made for the rationalization of production, the stabilization of the markets and the establishing of commercial connections both in Quebec and Canada as well as with foreign countries.

However, in order to understand the way in which Quebecers look at the fishing industry, it must be placed within a larger framework.

You are aware of the fact that the citizens of Quebec are now very wide awake concerning the development of their natural resources. In this development is mirrored their economic progress and the guarantee of a brilliant future. Natural resources, never the less, do not consist only of hydroelectric power and mines, as we are sometimes inclined to think; they also include fishing and everything that goes with it. This is why the Government has, in this field as in all other fields, put forth a very strong effort during the past year. In addition to the subsidies granted for the modernization of the fishing industry or for the construction of small fishing boats, we have increased the Maritime Credit services to help coastal fishermen; in the case of loans made by the Department of Game and Fisheries, the Government reimburses 4% interest and assumes the total cost of the loan insurance. In this way, the borrower has very little interest to pay and can use the amounts advanced to him to improve his equipment. The initial distributors and exporters, can pool their experience and their individual knowledge, and, in this way, promote the interests of the Canadian fishing industry. The amount which he must provide to obtain a modern boat has been reduced from 200 to 10%,

and the premium for the insurance on these boats is now also entirely paid by the Government. It is still too early to know the exact results of this new policy, but up to now they have been very encouraging.

I should mention at this point, the putting into service, in 1961, of a new type of steel trawler, the first of its kind in the province. It has a hold capacity of 100000 pounds of fish. While it is still only undergoing its trials, the first fishing experiments made with it have been conclusive, and we anticipate that twelve similar boats will be built in 1962. The Government will help in financing their construction.

I would also like to say a few words about sport fishing for which our province is so renowned. One of our first tasks in this connection has been to follow a policy of making the many and

- widespread lakes and rivers of our province accessible to the whole population, and not just to those who have wealth. To do this, we have to reduce the number of so called « private » lakes and build access roads by which it will be easier to reach them. We believe that all classes of the population should be able to benefit from the abundant resources with which nature has endowed us. We should be able, in the near future, to provide for the ever increasing demands of our Quebecers.

We have also decided to put an end to the selfish squandering of a resource which belongs to the whole population of Quebec. Our corps of fish-wardens is now better trained and we are sure that it will greatly reduce the abuses and even the ruin of certain water courses which have been the victims of too much fishing.

These are but a few examples of the overall policy which the provincial administration intends to set up in Quebec, in the fishing industry as well as in other spheres of activity. -Our needs remain enormous and it is not humanly possible to do everything at once. We will not relax our efforts, but we must be realistic and face the fact that we cannot make an accumulation of problems of all kinds disappear in a few months.

On a souvent dit que le mode de vie du pêcheur ressemblait un peu à celui de l'agriculteur. En effet, tout comme le travailleur de la terre, le travailleur de la mer ne peut, dans un pays comme le Canada, exercer son activité à longueur d'année. Il doit nécessairement ralentir et même arrêter complètement ses opérations à certaines périodes. Il en a toujours été ainsi, mais le progrès technique a permis à la production de croître sans cesse, sans qu'il soit pour autant nécessaire, pour le pêcheur ou l'agriculteur, de travailler davantage.

Pendant ses périodes d'arrêt de travail, le pêcheur s'est habitué, souvent par nécessité, à recourir à un emploi secondaire qui lui permet d'augmenter ses revenus et d'obtenir un meilleur niveau de vie. Je pense par exemple aux emplois occasionnels dans l'agriculture, l'industrie de la construction ou celle du déchargement de bateaux. Tel n'est pas le cas de tous les pêcheurs mais c'est celui d'un assez grand nombre pour qu'il vaille la peine de s'y intéresser.

À cause des facteurs en présence, personne ne peut croire que le gouvernement soit capable de résoudre entièrement le problème et d'assurer au pêcheur une stabilité parfaite d'emploi et de rémunération. Toutefois, la législation nouvelle, dont je parlais il y a un instant,

atténuera certainement le problème presque séculaire de ce groupe de citoyens, tout en permettant une production plus considérable. Les facilités de financement des bateaux et de l'équipement en général visent justement à aider le petit producteur, celui en somme qui est le plus sujet aux incertitudes du marché et de la température.

Le pêcheur doit aussi compter sur lui-même et sur les associations dont il est membre. J'ai parlé, à ce propos, du rôle social essentiel et remarquable joué par les coopératives et je croie que celui-ci peut et doit continuer à s'exercer. Je suis aussi d'avis qu'un organisme comme le vôtre, le « Conseil des Pêcheries du Canada », a une action importante à exercer. Je n'insiste pas sur la nature de ce rôle, car je me rends bien compte que vous en saisissez pleinement tous les aspects.

In closing, I would like to give you a thought which often comes into my mind. At the present time we hear a great deal about the rapid increase in the world population. We even wonder how human ingenuity will manage to ensure the feeding of future generations.

Some people suggest sowing the ocean beds, fertilizing the deserts, colonizing the planets, etc. And yet, fishing, which is the eldest of all occupations, has not been overtaken by events.

It still offers man an important part of his diet, and there is nothing to prevent us from thinking that this role can become even greater if, to the very necessary renewing of equipment, there is added a sensible conservation policy. I know that you are looking into this question, and that over and above the immediate problems that you must solve, you will not lose sight of this longer term problem. In this way, you are doing your part in your particular field and with the means at your disposal, not only to improve the quality of the service which you provide for your fellow countryman, but also to provide Canadians and citizens of other countries who depend on Canada for the food that they need. In your own way, you are contributing to the serious problem which the feeding of an ever growing humanity has now become, and which might prove to be alarming as time goes on.

Thus, though momentarily forgotten because of technical progress, particularly from the time of the industrial revolution to the era of automation, a primary industry – I should say a « primordial » industry – such as fishing has now come back to being front page news. Through your vigilance and dynamism, you will give it back the place it should have among the great modern industries.