

Sea lice issue invades legal briefing

By MATTHEW LITTLE
Epoch Times Staff

PARLIAMENT HILL, Ottawa—Sea lice made their presence felt during what was supposed to be a briefing about a Supreme Court decision on aquaculture to the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans on Monday.

That decision, handed down by the B.C. Supreme Court in February 2009, turned aquaculture regulations in British Columbia into paper mache by ruling that the provincial government did not have legal authority to regulate ocean finfish aquaculture.

Finfish aquaculture has been a hot issue in B.C. ever since reports started coming out that the practice of raising fish such as salmon in netted farms along the coast was possibly killing off wild stocks in the region.

Farmed animals are more apt to spread disease and parasites due to the close living quarters and research continues into the impact farmed fish have on wild stocks. Some researchers and critics—including Alexandra Morton whose constitutional challenge brought about the ruling—allege that sea lice proliferate in fish farms and then spread to wild fish as they

swim past, killing off stocks.

With the federal government set to take over regulating aquaculture in B.C., the issue of sea lice has come under closer scrutiny by parliamentarians.

Trevor Swerdfager, a Director General at Fisheries and Aquaculture Management came to Parliament Hill to tell the committee how the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) was preparing to take on its new responsibilities.

But when it came time for questions, there were as many about sea lice as there were about budgets and staffing.

Conservative MP John Weston and Liberal MP Keith Martin, both representing ridings in B.C., asked questions about the issue, as well as several others. Those questions represent the interests of constituents concerned that fish farming is damaging the ecosystem for coastal fish.

The department is currently restricted from issuing any new fish farm licenses or expansions until it takes full responsibility for regulating them in conjunction with the province of British Columbia, which retains some responsibilities. DFO is carrying out consultations and collecting data in prepara-

tion for drafting regulations so it can complete the take over by its court-mandated deadline of December 18 this year. Swerdfager said they already have some staff hired to work on the regulations.

Ecojustice, working on behalf of Living Oceans Society, threatened DFO with a lawsuit when it approved an expansion of a salmon farm near Port Hardy because it had not conducted a new environmental assessment. Earlier this month, the department conceded and announced that an environmental assessment will be done.

Swerdfager said DFO hopes to address concerns about fish farm-

ing by making information about the sector much more transparent. He also said the department would be ramping up research on sea lice.

While it is possible that other environmental groups could challenge provincial fish farming regulations in other parts of the country, he said the department is currently focusing on getting ready to assume responsibility for B.C. and not looking elsewhere. It is likely if such a challenge were to take place in other provinces that the B.C. ruling would be used as a precedent to strike down existing aquaculture regulations there.

Buy American deal fell short, MPs told

By MATTHEW LITTLE
Epoch Times Staff

PARLIAMENT HILL, Ottawa—Canada got whipped in its last trade deal with the United States according to some of the witnesses that testified before the Standing Committee on International Trade on Tuesday afternoon.

The committee was taking a closer look at the deal Canada negotiated with the United States to alleviate the worst effects of the Buy American policy.

Provisions in the policy had favoured U.S. companies and excluded Canadian businesses from participating in projects that used funds from the massive U.S. stimulus effort. Many sectors said Buy American provisions were hurting their bottom lines.

The deal saw both sides guarantee access to infrastructure projects for domestic firms operating across the border. Some witnesses testifying before the committee said Canada gave up too much for too little, giving American companies free access to Canadian markets in exchange for more limited access to the United States.

Steven Shrybman, an international trade attorney who works with the Council of Canadians, the country's largest citizens' organization, described the deal as "egregiously one-sided."

Shrybman said Canada should not have given up the right to ensure Canada could exercise its own "Buy Canadian" policies so that infrastructure investments could be targeted towards local businesses and Canadian firms.

He also criticized the agreement for forcing Canadian municipalities to learn the ins and outs of international trade agreements that will now have a bearing on their local infrastructure projects.

That may not have a significant impact, however, because most project bids are already open in the manner outlined in the agreement, said a representative from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities.

A union rep also blasted the deal, saying Canadian firms need a level playing field with the U.S. and they didn't get it from this deal.

"Canada always seems to be negotiating out of a position of weakness," said Guy Caron, a national rep with the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada. He said the deal was "history repeating itself" and another example of Canada get-

ting short thrift from the United States.

But Steve Ross, the general manager of Nova Scotia steel construction company Cherubini Metal Works, says he is optimistic the deal will help open up access to US\$20 billion worth of stimulus projects in the U.S. still to come online.

He said Buy American had blocked the steel company out of projects, but a poor U.S. economy and high Canadian dollar were also major factors that caused Cherubini's business with the U.S. to plummet from over half their revenue to just two or three percent.

'Canada always seems to be negotiating out of a position of weakness.'

— Guy Caron

Another major issue, he said, was that with the downturn U.S. companies have gotten extremely competitive.

"They are working and bidding projects just to survive," he said.

The government did get some praise for the speed of the deal from Michael Buda, a policy director at the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. He said it was nothing short of remarkable that the government got 13 provinces and territories to sign onto the deal in just six months, each with their own exemptions and caveats, like Ontario's transit exclusion.

But he also criticized the government for not including municipal procurement experts in the negotiations, and said he looked forward to Trade Minister Peter Van Loan's promise to work much closer with the federation.

Tuesday was the third time the committee heard from experts on trade with the United States. Previous witness have both praised and criticized the agreement. The Canadian Chamber of Commerce is among those that have called it a "step in the right direction" and said there was no point evaluating whether it was good enough because it was all that was available given the U.S. Congress's projectionist tendencies.

Niqab becomes flashpoint in debate over reasonable accommodations in Quebec

QUEBEC CONTINUED FROM P1

The MCC has called on Ottawa to ban the public wearing of the niqab and burqa, calling the garments "political symbols of Saudi-inspired Islamic extremism" that go against gender equality. The burqa covers the whole body, with a mesh-like panel over the face.

The organization says that since there is nothing in the Quran or other primary Islamic religious texts that oblige women to cover their face, the practice is not protected by the Charter's guarantee of religious freedom.

"When we take religion out of the whole ethos then what is left is a cultural practice," says Raza. "The question we have to ask ourselves is, 'When we come to Canada, how many different cultures and tribal customs is it going to support?'"

Sheikh Mohammed Tantawi, dean of al-Azhar University and Egypt's foremost spiritual authority, was instrumental in having a ban placed on the wearing of face-covering garments at any schools affiliated to al-Azhar, the world's top Sunni Islam institution.

According to media reports, Tantawi said the niqab "is a tradition, it has no connection with religion."

A ban on the the full Islamic veil is being studied in several European countries, including the Netherlands, France, Italy, and Austria. French president Nicholas Sarkozy has condemned the burqa as a tool of oppression against Muslim women.

In response to calls for a ban in Canada, a coalition of mainstream Muslim organizations and Islamic scholars have issued a statement saying banning the garments would contravene the fundamental principles of the country's democratic society.

"All Canadians, whether Muslim or not, are guaranteed by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms the freedom of religion and conscience," the statement said.

"Therefore, if a segment of Canadian Muslim women believe that wearing the niqab is part of their religious practice, then they must be allowed to freely do so. The principle must be extended to



The niqab, a style of headwear that leaves only the eyes exposed, has reignited the debate over accommodating minorities in Quebec. CRIS BOURONCLE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

all religious practices, provided the practice does not infringe upon the fundamental rights of others."

'ISLAMAPHOBIC SENTIMENT'

Ahmed has filed a complaint with Quebec's human rights commission, which will study the case in the coming months.

In the meantime, the Muslim Council of Montreal (MCM) has called for a "quiet and reasonable discussion" rather than a return to the debate around reasonable accommodations for minorities in Quebec.

"It is unfortunate that the Minister of Immigration herself had to get involved in this issue," Salam Elmenyawi, president of MCM, said in a statement.

"It would have been better for all parties if the issue was resolved by means of an evenhanded compromise between the student and the school administration, without the need of mediation from the human rights commission and the Muslim religious authorities."

Samer Majzoub, president of the Canadian Muslim Forum, said that by supporting the school's decision to expel Ahmed, the Quebec government is displaying "Islamophobic sentiment against Canadian Muslims and immigrants in general."

"To see big-name politicians getting involved in this issue has created this Islamophobic sentiment," Majzoub told CBC's the Current. MCM says the expulsion has

denied Ahmed the opportunity to learn the French language in order to fully integrate and become a productive member of society. Immigrants should feel a sense of belonging in their new home as opposed to feeling alienated, the statement said.

Raza however believes the niqab and burqa act not only as a barrier to communication but actually pose an obstacle to getting a job and integrating into Canadian society.

"This is something that will marginalize women and isolate them instead of helping them become part of mainstream society, because are they going to get jobs as school teachers or bank tellers? I don't think so."

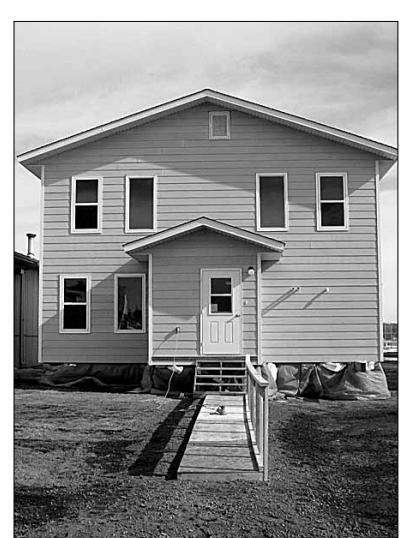
4
PUZZLES THE PEACE

Guess the hidden saying, phrase or word(s) suggested by the graphic below

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FREE THE CHILDREN
children helping children through education

SOLUTION ON P7



The two-storey, 2,000-square-foot home that was built by inmates at Riverbend Institution for a family from the Lac La Ronge First Nation in northern Saskatchewan. CORCAN

Prison inmates build home for needy family

By ANDREA HAYLEY
Epoch Times Staff

A family in need will soon move into a brand new home, thanks in large part to inmates at a Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, prison.

Between September and February, 19 inmates at the minimum-security Riverbend Institution put about 5,000 hours into building a home for a family from the Lac La Ronge First Nation in the province's north.

The two-storey, 2,000-square-foot energy efficient house was built on correctional facility grounds and then transported on a truck bed to the Lac La Ronge reserve.

The house-building rehabilitation program is part of Correctional

Services of Canada's CORCAN correctional plan for inmates at Riverbend.

"One of the programs that we offer is a 12-week construction training program," says Travis Boone, regional director for CORCAN in the Prairies.

"This program teaches offenders more than basic construction skills. It's a five-module, 12-week program that we teach them and then once they're done that program we offer them practical skills to reinforce what they've learned."

The project—thought to be the first of its kind in Canada—was conceived after government and non-profit stakeholders got together to discuss ways to improve housing shortages on aboriginal reserves.

"It was a joint effort, because we are seeking out partnerships to improving our ability to train in a realistic work environment," says Boone.

Out of the 19 men that were involved in building the house, nine have been released—five of whom have already found employment in the construction industry.

"We're training them for what they need to have to get meaningful employment on release," Boone says.

"Our mandate is to work with the guys and provide them training and skills so that they become employable, so that they want to give back to the community. They're getting a sense of self-worth and value, and they have marketable employment skills for when they go out into the

community."

There are plans to build more homes in the future, he says.

"Lessons learned, we would build a smaller home, but we are continuing to negotiate how we can continue to deliver this type of program in a correctional environment and building on the partnerships we've already created."

He adds that he would like to see other correctional institutions initiate a similar program.

"This is a good example of partnerships between government and non-government agencies. It addresses a real issue for communities and our correctional environment."

"This is good corrections at work."