

Senator Lang: Can you say anything about coal?

Hon. Mr. Drury: Again, in the field of energy, coal is an area in which we have substantial deposits. Without beginning to do all of the classification and subdivision, let me say that we will be doing a program looking to the possibilities—not actually doing it but simply looking at the possibilities—of doing an economic classification of our coal deposits, given the fact that one of the serious barriers to the greater use of coal in this country, particularly with respect to strip-mined or surface-mined coal, is the transportation economics. I am sure the senator is well aware that the long-distance transportation of gas is much easier and far less costly. It is much more economical to transport energy in the form of gas than as a solid or in the form of coal.

Senator Lang: Is there any research presently underway with respect to long-distance transmission of electrical power?

Hon. Mr. Drury: Electrical power?

Senator Lang: For example, if it was found that it was most economical to build a thermal plant at a coal site and transport the energy in the form of electricity.

Hon. Mr. Drury: Extensive work is being done in that line. That is not something new. That work will be continued. That work involves the general problems of transmission over long distances of electrical power, particularly at high voltages. There is a joint laboratory between the federal government, the responsibility for which is in the National Research Council, and Hydro Quebec, near Bécancour.

Senator Lang: What concerns me in this line of questioning, Mr. Minister, is that in both the oceans policy and the energy policy we seem to find all of the problems fractioned off into various government agencies or departments without any general overall policy direction, other than to take inventory of our present situation. I am concerned that we could be taking inventory from now until the year 2000 without getting any initiative into the system. Is that a concern to you, and, if so, do you think we can overcome that problem through an agency such as MOSST or would it be in some other way?

Hon. Mr. Drury: You say you are worried about the initiative, and that one really should not rely on the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources to show the initiative or to address themselves to these problems. I do not think that is so. I have just indicated that the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources has put together a comprehensive research and development program covering all of these aspects of the energy field.

The Chairman: That is not what your document says. Your document says that this is still under consideration by cabinet. There is no program yet.

Hon. Mr. Drury: Well, in fact I am taking advantage of a very short timeframe here. At the time it was written it was true. Since that time two weeks have passed, and so rapid is the initiative that what was hitherto only a dream is now a decision.

The Chairman: After two years.

Senator Carter: Would Senator Lang include methanol as a source of fuel on the energy list?

Senator Lang: That would be a pretty small factor.

Senator Carter: Well, we have tremendous possibilities for that in Canada, you know.

Hon. Mr. Drury: Generally speaking, in the biomass field here, because we cannot cover all possibilities—we just have not the resources, particularly at a time when the public of Canada is asking for restraint, we have to make choices. We choose those fields which have the greatest potential.

Senator Grosart: Who chooses?

Hon. Mr. Drury: Well, I suppose one might say the choice is made by the cabinet. We choose between those fields which we will put the resources into or concentrate on and those which we hope others will take care of. At the moment the biomass and all of its energy products is not a field which seems to offer the attractions of short-run benefits, and there are a number of other countries more advanced than we are in this field. Therefore, it would be our purpose to make sure we maintain a working knowledge of what they are doing and discovering. That is what I call a level of awareness.

Senator Lang: The research team in the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources is concerned with final policy. It is a decision, I presume, by cabinet. Is that an in-house research team or does that involve the private sector at all?

Hon. Mr. Drury: It is not a research team. Like MOSST, it is in a sense, but in a larger way, a small planning group in the energy field. The actual research will be carried out, not by that department but by others. In some cases, indeed in a great many cases, it will be carried out not even by government departments, but by either research teams in universities or research teams in industry.

What we have is a complete plan of work to be done in the energy field, and of who is going to do it. All those who are going to do it are spelled out. The purpose of this is the kind of planning to bar accidents that Senator Grosart feels we are the victim of. There has been comprehensive planning here, and a scheme has been developed to make sure that no bets are overlooked, and that there is no well or badly inspired, independent and, if I may use that term, unco-ordinated action.

With regard to whose idea it was and who pushed it, you are trying to encourage me to say that the idea was MOSST's, and that it was MOSST that was pushing it; but I will decline that invitation. I do not think there are many yards to be gained by asserting either jurisdiction or originality of thought.

Senator Lang: May I ask one final question? After energy, Mr. Minister, in your opinion what is the next most urgent problem facing Canadians to which a scientific effort could be devoted?

Hon. Mr. Drury: Your first question, which I answered quite quickly, was, "Which are the most urgent problems which have a large scientific and technological input?" The answer I gave did not mean that in my view the government's most urgent problems were the two I mentioned, but rather that they were the ones with a big scientific and technological input.

The second one I mentioned was communications, and this will always be a problem for Canada. As a very large territory with a relatively sparse population we have com-