

Honourable Senator Gershaw, calling the attention of the Senate to the need for conserving Canada's water resources.

Hon. Norman A. MacKenzie: Honourable senators, I have listened with keen interest to the speeches delivered this evening on a most important and moving topic, because it happened to be an area in which I have had a special interest for some time, for I am concerned with human values, morality and decency; therefore, I commend the honourable senators who have spoken.

However, tonight, thanks to the courtesy of Senator Beaubien (Provencher), this topic raised by Senator Gershaw, and spoken to by Senator Cameron, has been on the order paper for some months, so I thought it would be in order to deal briefly with this topic of our fresh water resources, and to leave it for the further consideration of this honourable chamber.

It is frequently stated, with reason, that our fresh water resources are probably the most important natural resources which we possess in Canada. Like the air we breathe and the food we eat, fresh water is basic and essential to life on this planet, and obviously adequate supplies of fresh water are of tremendous importance.

In this respect, we Canadians are the most fortunate of people, for despite our relatively small population, 0.6 per cent of the world's population, we have between 25 per cent and 30 per cent of all the fresh water resources of the world.

The population of our neighbour, the United States of America, is increasing rapidly. By the year 2000 it is expected to reach the 340 million mark. Substantial areas in the United States are already short of water, and its increasing population, plus the increasing uses of and needs for fresh water, will make the shortage even more serious.

It is true that in respect of their own fresh water resources, as in many other areas, and many other countries, the people and governments of the United States have been careless and wasteful and pollution has become a major problem.

In Montreal two weeks ago an important conference attended by over 500 delegates and provincial ministers was held. The Honourable Jean-Luc Pepin was good enough to invite Senator Cameron and myself to attend as observers. Senator Cameron did attend, and I hope that in due course he will report on it.

Unfortunately, I was unable to go along, but I have heard sufficient about it and I know

enough about it to realize that, in the Great Lakes, particularly in Lake Erie, and in many of our streams rivers and other lakes, even with our limited population water pollution and air pollution cause a situation which, if we do not deal with it effectively and soon, will become a major problem.

In the the United States, with their tremendous population and the kind of free-for-all life that they live, water pollution is already a major problem and contributes to their desire for increasing quantities of pure fresh water.

Regardless of this—which is, in a sense, within their own control—the Government and people of the United States are almost certain to want, and probably to need, some of our fresh water.

Science, and the economic development of nuclear energy, will make it possible to obtain quantities of fresh water from the surrounding oceans. Even so, natural fresh water, particularly in the inland sections of the continent, will always be of great importance.

I predict that in Canada in the years ahead we will have to consider and deal with this problem. Therefore, I would urge, if it is in order, that in due course we in the Senate make a thorough study of this whole question so that we may know all of the facts and obtain the most expert information in regard to it, and express ourselves publicly about it.

It is only as this is done by an increasing number of responsible people and organizations, will the importance and the magnitude of this problem become known.

I am the first to confess that I am not in a position now to do more than indicate a serious interest in the matter. However, Government policy about the export of hydroelectric power has changed radically and fundamentally in recent years. The United States—and more particularly the City of Chicago and the State of Illinois—are already diverting substantial quantities of fresh water from the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence system.

I am aware, as are all members of the Senate, that we encourage the export of our wasting assets—oil, gas and other minerals—although we know that when these have been used up they never can be replaced. In contrast, fresh water, like forests and agricultural production, with intelligent management, is a continuing resource that is self-perpetuating. It seems to me that it could be exported and sold if the return were adequate and if the necessary measures of control were set out. In regard to that, however, I am not