

Fisheries Act

My colleague, the hon. member for South Shore (Mr. Crouse), referred very eloquently and impressively to the proliferation of pollution legislation either now before Parliament or pending. This fact was also alluded to by the hon. member who just resumed his seat. I am convinced, Mr. Speaker, that the buck-passing has to stop somewhere. Someone must have the ultimate responsibility for the control of the pollution and cleaning up the waters of our country that have been polluted as a consequence of neglect.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McGrath: In addition to listening to the minister's speech today, I have read some of his speeches in recent weeks, particularly his speech on April 8 to the Executive Council of the Canadian Manufacturers Association. I have formed the impression that the minister is fighting a losing battle within the cabinet. I think the minister fully appreciates the fact that if he is to do the job of Minister of Fisheries, he must have the legislative authority to control water pollution in all aspects. This has been said before. My colleague, the hon. member for South Shore, said it today. I said it during the second reading stage of the Canada water bill. It has also been said by other hon. members. The Canada Water Act is not necessary. It is window dressing. It should be withdrawn. If we need further proof of that, we need only read some of the speeches of the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry (Mr. Davis) and, indeed the legislation now before us, the amendment to the Fisheries Act. The minister knows this, but I do not think he has been able to sell the idea to his colleagues.

In addition to the Canada Water Act, we have a still further proliferation of the laws of our country respecting pollution. The Northern Inland Waters Act is now before Parliament. There is proposed legislation dealing with pollution of the high seas which presumably flows from the Brussels Conference on Pollution of the High Seas which took place last year. In the final analysis, the ultimate responsibility must rest with the Minister of Fisheries.

It will be most unfortunate if there is a dilution of government authority because as a consequence of this dilution no minister, including the Minister of Fisheries, will be able to deal effectively with pollution. The government should recognize this and withdraw the Canada Water Act. The government should immediately enter into negotiations or

discussions with the United States government aimed at entering into some agreement with that country. Without such an agreement with the United States, no matter what we do, we will not have the ultimate control necessary in this country to keep our own environment clean. That is a simple fact of life. It is a fact of geography.

At the present time there is legislation before the United States Congress, similar in many aspects to the legislation before this House, aimed at dealing with water pollution in that country. I doubt if our government is even aware of the debates that are taking place in that country. There should be a meeting of minds. In my opinion, there should be a continuing committee representing the responsible ministers of both cabinets which would have the responsibility of at least keeping each other informed of our various laws and regulations dealing with pollution. Such a joint cabinet committee could be the forerunner of what has to be the ultimate solution in the continental fight against pollution, a treaty between our two countries.

There are two aspects of pollution that the minister alluded to which are of great concern. I wish to deal with the threat to our fishing resources posed by oil pollution. Oil pollution manifests itself in a number of ways. There is continuous pollution caused by tankers dumping their ballast on the high seas beyond the reach and control of any government. How this is to be controlled is one of the great problems facing the world today, especially when we consider that over half the tonnage of the ocean cargoes of the world is composed of oil. Giant tankers are being added to the tanker fleets of the world every day. If an accident were to occur to one of these fully loaded giant tankers, it would represent nothing short of a world crisis.

The second aspect of the oil pollution problem is the possibility that any day there may be success in the explorations that are taking place and oil will be tapped on the continental shelf. The consequence of an accidental spill from one of these offshore wells could be disastrous. We must consider the resources of our Grand Banks. We saw what happened with the Santa Barbara spill off the coast of California and with the spill that occurred a short time ago off the coast of Louisiana. The time has come for us to make some hard and fast decisions. If I had the responsibility of choosing between the oil industry on our continental shelf or the fishing resources of the Grand Banks, I would opt for the latter.