

*Government Orders*

I note for the hon. members of this Chamber that the release of the minister's green paper was coincidental with the release of the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development which, among other things, called for a strengthening of environmental assessment procedures at all levels of government.

• (1600)

Over the following year, a series of regional meetings and a national consultation workshop afforded opportunities for the public to scrutinize and comment on the proposals. The public input so gained was incorporated into the first draft of the proposed Canadian Environmental Assessment Act which was first tabled in this House in the spring of 1990.

Subsequently during 1991, individuals and organizations from across Canada made submissions to the all-party legislative committee reviewing the proposed legislation.

I would note by the way that the chairman of that committee is in the House, as indeed is the chairman of that committee's successor.

This past fall, the Minister of the Environment tabled a revised bill based on the public input before the committee. That brings us to the present.

What we have before us today in Bill C-13 is the result of four years of very significant labour by Canadians who care for the environment. It has been subject to and benefited from three separate rounds of public consultations.

Together, the opposition parties proposed a total of 135 amendments. After consulting with Canadians, the government itself proposed 60 changes to the legislation, some of which I shall make specific reference to in just a moment.

Even beyond these three opportunities for public comment, in a most unusual step before being tabled in the House today, the final version was poured over by lawyers from the Canadian Environmental Network during clause by clause. I have already referred to the efforts of Mr. Pannell and Mr. Andrews earlier in my remarks.

Consequently, the bill that is before us now is a synthesis of the knowledge, expertise and opinion of as broad a spectrum of environmentally knowledgeable and sensitive Canadians as one could hope to find.

That, however, does not suggest that Bill C-13 is the ultimate environmental assessment legislation. It is not and indeed it could not be at this particular point in time. I would suggest that Bill C-13 is literally miles ahead, if I may still use the term miles, of what we would normally regard as the *status quo*.

If the current environmental assessment procedures can be characterized as uncertain and unclear then the proposed reforms must be described as definite and precise. What is before us today is modern legislation intended for a modern world.

We have before us legislation which provides a strong foundation for environmental assessment procedures for the 1990s and indeed for beyond. As I have said before in this chamber, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act will give us assessment procedures that are more efficient, more consistent and more cost-effective than what we have now.

It will do this by ensuring that the adverse environmental effects of a project under study are identified, evaluated and addressed early in the planning stages before decisions are irrevocably cast. All of us would applaud that. It will do so by strengthening public participation in the assessment process and by providing the opportunity to and encouraging those who may be affected by a proposal to influence federal government decisions about it.

Where there is disagreement over the value of potential environmental changes wrought by a project, these new and improved review procedures are designed to facilitate a consensus agreement among the stakeholders.

When implemented, the new Canadian Environmental Assessment Act will give substance to the principles of sustainable development. It will ensure that environmental factors are studied as diligently as economic and social considerations.

The new environmental assessment procedures will encourage the federal government to make decisions that integrate environmental and economic considerations and move us closer to our stated goal of achieving sustainable development.

All proposals with the potential to change the environment that require a federal initiative undertaking or activity will be studied for environment effect.