

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, January 14, 1971

The House met at 2 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

POLLUTION

LAKES ERIE AND ONTARIO AND ST. LAWRENCE RIVER— TABLING OF FINAL REPORT OF INTERNATIONAL JOINT COMMISSION

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I should like to table herewith the report of the International Joint Commission on pollution of Lake Erie, Lake Ontario and the international section of the St. Lawrence River. This report is also being released in Washington today by the government of the United States.

The final report represents the culmination of six years of work following upon a request in October, 1964, as supplemented by a further request in 1969 to the IJC by the two governments for an inquiry into the extent, causes and locations of pollution in these waters.

The breadth and scope of this report shatters all precedents. It deals with the most extensive water pollution studies undertaken anywhere to date. The report provides guidelines that can be an inspiration to the peoples of Canada and the United States in the critical period ahead to deal with the Great Lakes pollution problem. It provides a basis for the concrete action that is now already under way with the assistance of the interim reports that the commission has made to the two governments over the period of the entire study.

• (2:10 p.m.)

In this report the IJC states that:

1. The waters are being seriously polluted on both sides of the boundary to the detriment of both countries to an extent that is causing injury to health and property.

2. The polluted waters are lakewide in extent; the principal causes are wastes discharged into the boundary waters and their tributaries by municipalities and industries.

3. Urgent remedial measures are required; these are set out in specific recommendations for action by the two governments and all responsible jurisdictions in both countries. Programs to be agreed upon to meet the water quality objectives are set out in the report. These are aimed to bring about immediate reduction of the phosphorus content in detergents, the prompt implementation of vigorous programs to treat municipal and industrial waste, and the reduction of phosphorus inputs into these waters. The report also contains programs to deal with problems caused by oil spills, mercury, radioactive substances and other hazardous material entering these waters.

The need for urgent action is based on the commission's findings that Lake Erie, particularly its western basin, is in an advanced state of eutrophication, and that accelerated eutrophication is taking place in Lake Ontario.

The report recognizes that governments will have to enter into agreements for the carrying out of programs and of measures and schedules to achieve them. The report recommends that the commission be given the authority, responsibility and means for co-ordinating and ensuring the necessary surveillance and monitoring of water quality and of the effectiveness of pollution abatement programs. It further recommends that the reference of October, 1964, be extended to authorize it to investigate pollution in the remaining boundary waters in the Great Lakes system and waters flowing into it.

A meeting with the United States at the ministerial level in Ottawa last June initiated discussions which are now continuing between the two countries aimed at more effective co-operative action to control pollution and water quality in the Great Lakes.

The June meeting, at which Canada was represented by members of the federal and Ontario governments, established a joint Canada-United States working group to study various ways of creating a more effective basis for co-operation to deal with Great Lakes pollution in light of the findings and recommendations to be contained in the final IJC report as now presented.

The joint working group met in Washington in September and organized ten subgroups to examine in detail particular aspects of the problem. On the Canadian side, some 100 experts from several federal government departments and from Ontario government departments and agencies are involved, together with a corresponding number of officials from United States federal departments and Great Lakes States' governments.

The joint working group will report to a second ministerial meeting on Great Lakes pollution planned to take place later this year. Decisions taken at this second ministerial meeting will provide for concerted programs aimed to achieve agreed water quality objectives and the means to put such programs into action. These programs will include a commitment to implement other recommendations contained in the report and to establish effective mechanisms to perform the necessary surveillance functions.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the many people in Canada and the United States who have contributed to the work behind this important report. In particular, I would like, on behalf of the government and the people of Canada, to thank Mr. Christian Herter, chairman of the United States section. As members will know, the chairman of the Canadian section for the past eight years was the late Arnold Heeny. His contribution to the work