

# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, December 17, 1971

The House met at 11 a.m.

## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

### POWER

#### TABLING OF INTERNATIONAL JOINT COMMISSION REPORT ON PROPOSED FLOODING OF SKAGIT RIVER VALLEY—STATEMENT BY MINISTER

**Hon. Jack Davis (Minister of the Environment):** Mr. Speaker, I should like to table the International Joint Commission's report on the environmental and ecological consequences in Canada of raising Ross Lake in the Skagit Valley on the west coast.

As hon. members know, the International Joint Commission was asked earlier this year to study a proposal to flood the Upper Skagit Valley in British Columbia. The commission's report, which I have just tabled, has been submitted to the governments of Canada and the United States in response to a request from Ottawa and Washington to review the environmental consequences of raising the Ross dam in the state of Washington on the other side of the border. I would like to thank the six-member International Joint Commission for preparing its report on such short notice. Since April, 1971, it has held hearings on the west coast and carried out various studies, the results of which are being made public in our two national capitals today.

The commissioners report that the High Ross reservoir, were it to be filled, would flood 10 of the 15 miles of the reach of the Skagit River that is the most suitable for fishing and recreational pursuits. It would inundate approximately 5,180 acres in Canada. This is more than 40 per cent of the 10,550 acres of reasonably flat land in the valley.

The commission finds that the Skagit Valley is an uncommon and non-restorable area and has important social values. It also finds that this flooding will result in the loss, in varying degrees, of some important elements of the local environment and, to use its own words, a simplification of the ecology. The commission also tells us that:

The time limitations of this study precluded obtaining information on the cost of mitigating the effects of flooding in the valley.

The quotation continues:

In the absence of knowledge of the costs of protection and enhancement and having only rough estimates of the benefits that might accrue, the commission recommends that these mitigative measures be fully studied before the Ross dam is raised, and that they be undertaken to the extent that the government agencies concerned find them feasible.

Finally, the International Joint Commission tells us that:

Under normal conditions, a study of environmental and ecological conditions should encompass three full years. In contrast, this study was conducted over a period of four months, from early June when public hearings were held, to early October. Therefore, the investigation of the advisory group consisted mainly of an interpretation of raw, and sometimes incomplete, data collected by others and to a review of published reports.

The Canadian government's position is that these environmental and ecological conditions should be fully understood and carefully assessed before any additional flooding is contemplated in the Upper Skagit Valley in British Columbia.

We shall, of course, be examining the International Joint Commission's report in detail, as will the government of British Columbia and the relevant authorities in the United States. After we have completed this review, we will again be discussing the future of the Skagit Valley with our opposite numbers in Victoria and Washington, D.C. The government will be making a further report to the House at that time.

**Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition):** Mr. Speaker, the excerpts from the International Joint Commission's report quoted by the minister confirm the impression widely held in British Columbia, which I share, that the Skagit Valley is an uncommon and non-restorable area which has important social values. It also finds that flooding will result in the loss in varying degrees of some important elements of the local environment and a simplification of the ecology. In other words, the study confirms the impressions generally held in that region concerning the importance of preserving the environment in the Skagit Valley and the damage that would be done by flooding.

My impression from the brief excerpts the minister has read from the IJC report is that the commission did not consider banning or recommending indefinite postponement of the actual flooding. The commission did not consider recommending the deferment of the hydroelectric development. The commission's recommendations seem to be confined to the scope of measures which might be taken to mitigate the damage that would be done to the environment in the Skagit Valley. As I say, this is the impression one gets from the excerpts given us by the minister. It is disappointing to many, including myself, that the International Joint Commission did not recommend abandonment of the flooding and seems to confine its recommendations simply to mitigating the damages that might be caused by such flooding. However, the commission has emphasized the importance of preserving the valley. It has emphasized that the damage which it predicts would be done would be irreparable.