

# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, March 14, 1974

The House met at 2 p.m.

## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

### ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

#### ANNOUNCEMENT OF SCREENING OF FEDERAL GOVERNMENT PROJECTS

**Hon. Jack Davis (Minister of the Environment):** Mr. Speaker, beginning April 1, 1974, federal government projects will be screened to ensure that they do the least possible damage to our natural environment. Most of these projects will be cleared with little comment. Others, because of their likely effect on the quality of life in this country, must be examined very carefully indeed.

Federal departments, Crown agencies and private companies with government contracts, grants and loans will have to prepare environmental impact statements. These statements will be screened by a panel of experts in my department. Recommendations for action, that is, for approval, for modification or for denial, will be made to the Minister of the Environment. Final dispositions will, of course, have to be worked out in consultation with other ministers of the Crown.

Essentially, our new environmental assessment and review process is this. The initiator will be responsible for securing, at the earliest possible stage in the planning of a project or other environmentally significant activity, a forecast of likely environmental effects. This statement must use baseline data and procedural guidelines provided by Environment Canada.

If the initiating department, Crown agency or private firm has sufficient expertise it will prepare its own environmental impact study. If not, it will have to obtain this advice from outside sources at its own expense. When completed, the statement will be screened by a panel of experts in Environment Canada. Any element or aspect of the plan which the panel finds unacceptable must be noted and referred to the Minister of the Environment before the project proceeds.

Public disclosure is important. Written assessments made by the panel will, therefore, be published. Public participation is also vital. In cases of broad public interest, the Minister of the Environment, in consultation with the minister of the initiating department, may, therefore, appoint an environmental review board, the membership of which may be drawn from outside the Public Service. This review board will be able to hold public hearings and make recommendations which will be published.

More specifically, the initiator of a new project or activity with possible environmental consequences must:

1. Take environmental considerations into account from the outset;

2. Submit their project to a panel in Environment Canada or a public review board before financial or other commitments are made;

3. Incorporate recommendations made during the course of our screening process into the design, construction and operation of the new project or activity; and

4. Prepare to publish, or otherwise make public, their findings and plans in this regard.

In order to meet local needs, regional panels may also be necessary. They will be struck from time to time and in such places as the need for assessing and reviewing the environmental consequences of particular developments dictates.

This environmental assessment and review process will help to round out the resource management and environmental protection programs already under way in my department. It will be implemented in stages. It will also be put into effect in close consultation with the provinces and with industry.

I hope, in the process, that we can avoid the delays and other pitfalls which a strictly legalistic approach would cause in this country. Our approach, I believe, is the right approach. We will not hold up important developments which are clean from an environmental point of view and, in contrast to the situation which has developed in the United States, we will not bring the environmental assessment process into disrepute. We will not be charged with blocking everything. At the same time, we will make a great deal of information public. We will, I believe, deal effectively and efficiently with certain projects which are bound to be controversial because of their impact on our environment. In some instances, as we all know, these effects can be very serious indeed.

**Mr. John A. Fraser (Vancouver South):** Mr. Speaker, the other day the minister, in answering questions put to him in the House by my colleague the hon. member for Portage (Mr. Masniuk), said he would be making a statement to clarify government policy on environmental impact today. With respect, Mr. Speaker, if this statement is supposed to be clarification it falls far short of what is needed in this country.

There was a great deal said in the minister's statement about making public the contents of environmental impact studies. But if one looks at the statement of the minister carefully he will find that this policy has been carefully geared to make sure that anything the government does not want the public to know will not be revealed. If you look at the procedure outlined by the minister today you will see it is quite clear that it is not until after a panel of experts of the minister's department have prepared a report based on their consideration of the environmental