

Fisheries Act

and with this sense of urgency, that I feel the federal government ought to be approaching the question before us now.

I feel that this assertion of the concern of this Parliament could best be expressed not by the piecemeal bits of legislation introduced to control this or that aspect of pollution, but by a general act which would spell out the principles relating to the preservation of our environment which this Parliament feels should be adopted. This general act would give authority to the Governor in Council to set out quality standards as they would apply to any form of development across the country. If we had such an act we could assess, on the basis of its criteria, whether a particular idea for managing all water resources in a certain region of the country was desirable or not. We could assess, if we knew what those regulations were, whether it would be desirable to bring the operation of various acts under particular definitions that would be set out in those regulations.

I quoted from my own speech and may I now briefly refer to one which was made by someone else. I am referring to a release from the Department of Fisheries and Forestry of Canada under the date of January 15, 1970. The first page has a synopsis of the minister's speech at the North Vancouver Chamber of Commerce monthly luncheon of January 5, 1970. The first item of the synopsis indicates that the minister believes a national water quality code is essential. I must say that I agree with the minister. Then, the release tells one to see page 4 of the speech. I always become interested in the fine print when I see headings like that. On page 4, I read that the minister believes we need a national water quality code. He also says that we need regional guidelines drawn to meet regional needs. Well, Mr. Speaker, what we have before us are proposals to develop some regional guidelines to meet regional needs; but we are building a body, as it were, without any head. I agree with the minister when he says that we need a national water quality code.

Yet the minister who believes in the need for a national water quality code and who now has in his hands legislation, which although poorly drafted for present purposes nevertheless gives authority to put forward a national water quality code, is apparently voluntarily asking this House to approve his surrendering the authority to develop a national water quality code. This, to me, is a pretty basic flaw in the proposal the minister

[Mr. Barnett.]

is putting before the House and I for one do not find myself inclined to accept. I hope that before we proceed too far with this bill we can get some indication, if not from the minister then at least from the government, as to whether and when it is intended to bring to a head, as it were, this question of establishing national standards, not only in the field of the control of the purity of our water but in the fields relating to the control of the purity of our air and soil. I think the minister will agree that all these things are interrelated directly and indirectly. He knows, for example, that in the design of a pulp and paper mill the two questions of water purity and air purity are very much interrelated. In some cases, of course, it is possible to improve the quality of water discharged from a plant by increasing the quantity of pollution that is going out in the air, and vice versa.

This is the assessment I make of what I think is undoubtedly the key proposal in this bill. I have tried to assess it on its merits as I see them. I think that in many respects, as I have said, it represents an improvement over the present act but it has what I fear, Mr. Speaker, could very well turn out to be a fatal error, one which would downgrade the effectiveness of the kind of work that has been done by our various fisheries scientists over the years. Far from increasing their influence in the councils of the nation, it might very well relegate them to a corner where their efforts would be even less effective than they have been up to the present time. These are the considerations which I submit should certainly be uppermost in the minds of hon. members of the House in discussing the merits of the bill. I hope, perhaps before the bill proceeds much further on its way, that we can obtain some agreement that some arguments I have advanced have validity. Then, either through this bill or some other way, the general approach being taken to the control of water pollution in Canada by the government may be changed and improved.

• (4:40 p.m.)

Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, having listened to the minister's speech, it now seems evident that we will have to wait until we get this bill before the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Forestry before we can have the amendments proposed in it explained in detail, indeed before we can have some of our fears hopefully put to rest.