

*Government Orders*

The intent of this legislation is not to stop development but to ensure that it proceeds with full knowledge of the potential impact of a proposed project on the ecosystem—our air, water, land and living organisms. The process helps factor environmental effects into project proposals in much the same way as cost resources and labour are regularly considered.

In fact, one of the greatest benefits of this legislation is that it will streamline the federal environmental assessment considerably and make it more efficient and effective.

As many hon. colleagues are well aware, efficiency is very important. If we are to make environmental assessments central to our process of decision making then it goes without saying that this process must identify environmental impacts as expeditiously as possible. This is important to both business and governments alike.

I would like to add that just because it increases efficiency and effectiveness does not necessarily mean that it is just a rubber stamp for projects. The importance is that environmental factors will be considered early. A decision will be made and the process will then either proceed or not proceed.

In the time allotted to me today I want to highlight just a few of the features of the new Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. First, the act ensures that resources are focused where most needed by dividing projects into categories according to their degree of environmental risk. In this manner the act ensures that projects posing the greatest environmental risk receive the most attention.

The act also requires that the cumulative environmental effects of a project in combination with other projects or activities be reviewed. As well, the act ensures that public comments and concerns, and technically and economically feasible measures for mitigating any environmental effects are considered in the assessment.

The act also introduces features to streamline the public review process.

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The act introduces, for the first time, mediation as a means of making the public review of major projects more efficient. Mediation ensures that all environmental

facts are reviewed, but without the formality, length and cost of a panel review.

We have also listened to the concerns of provinces regarding efficiency. In the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act this government has provided measures to permit joint assessment with the provinces with the intention of minimizing the duplication of assessment processes.

Another way in which this legislation will streamline the federal environmental assessment process and make it more effective is by giving review panels, for the first time, the power to subpoena witnesses and information required for the assessment. Currently review panels rely solely on the good will of participants.

Further, to ensure that the new process is effective it incorporates a requirement for feedback programs. The Canadian Environmental Assessment Act requires that follow-up and monitoring plans be prepared as part of the final assessment report on major projects.

The Canadian Environmental Assessment Act is a product of more than four years of broad consultations with a wide spectrum of Canadians. The act has benefited from the contributions of governments, the private sector, native peoples, environmental and other non-governmental groups, the legal community, environmental assessment professionals and individuals.

Common sense tells us that an efficient and effective environmental assessment process saves time and money in the long run. By integrating environmental factors at the planning stage business and governments avoid expensive and sometimes controversial remedial action programs.

The Canadian Environmental Assessment Act is an expression of this government's commitment to a healthy and competitive future. It will help us to sustain an environmentally sound and economically prosperous future for all Canadians.

As I have followed this bill for the last year and a half or more there have been many stages and many changes during the activities of the committee. The evolution of this bill reflects at least two things.

First, it reflects a willingness to change and be progressive in the development of environmental policy within the government. It also reflects the very rapid advancement of environmental legislation on a world-wide basis.