

Territorial Lands Act

proper, as the Government has done, to wait for the request from the Northwest Territories, and it came in July 1985.

In September, as my hon. friend mentioned, an agreement to transfer was signed between the Department of Northern Development and the territorial Department of Renewable Resources.

In September 1986—and this is crucial to the entire agreement and to the legislation today—the Dene nation and the Métis association announced their full support for the transfer. We came full circle. Therefore, the timing of the legislation is right and proper. I fail to see how it could have come much sooner without the concurrence of the territorial department, of the Dene nation, and of the Métis association.

I want to take a moment to relate briefly, for the benefit of those who are unfamiliar with what is involved in forest management, what is involved. In the north, forest management involves, for example, issuing timber permits to authorize the cutting of timber on a small scale. It also involves the negotiation of timber management agreements with major operators and the implementation of inventory projects to develop knowledge of the location, the quality and the extent of harvestable timber, and the management of forest fire operations. Forest fire fighting to protect people, property, and resources is one of the major responsibilities which the Government of the Northwest Territories will now be assuming.

I, along with my hon. friend from Western Arctic, strongly favour an accelerated devolution of responsibility from the federal Government to the territorial Governments. Along with him I take satisfaction that all affected employees under the Department of Northern Development will be offered a job. If for one reason or other they do not wish to accept that job, they will be receiving benefits under the federal workforce adjustment policy. Along with the devolution, I also favour a rapid winding down of the northern development section of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs. My hon. friend will know from many committee meetings on the subject that there is an excessive amount of overlap in what is done by the federal Department of Northern Development, the territorial Government, and the territorial public service. In these days when we have to be concerned about rising Government expenditures, the national debt and the continuing deficit which is mortgaging future generations, here is one area where an effective step could be taken by winding down that part of the department and transferring responsibilities to the territorial governments. I share as well with the Hon. Member that in time, and let it be the not too distant future, the Territories will achieve full provincial responsibility within our federal system.

• (1620)

The Hon. Member knows, as do all members of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, that before that can happen, as desirable as it is, there are some outstanding and unresolved issues. They include a

fair, equitable and satisfactory settlement of all the comprehensive aboriginal claims north of 60. I am pleased to note with respect to this legislation that the actual ownership of the forests will be transferred to the Government of the Northwest Territories only after there is an enactment of a Dene-Métis land claims settlement, after we ratify such an agreement in this House. I am also delighted that in no way is this piece of legislation today in any way affecting native claims.

There is also the need to deal with the recognition of aboriginal self-government in the north, the conclusion of successful negotiations regarding jurisdiction, funding and resource revenue sharing. Those matters must also be dealt with before devolution can be hastened. Then, of course, we must know how aboriginal Governments will interrelate with those territorial authorities. None of those matters are beyond resolution. They require reasonable exchanges, leadership at the federal and territorial levels, and further improvement in our comprehensive claims policy, but in all those areas we are moving in the right direction. Devolution also depends on resolving the matter of dividing the Northwest Territories into two separate Territories.

Since I and my Party are not in any way opposing this Bill—we want it to go through its various stages as quickly as possible—I simply conclude by urging the Government of Canada and the Yukon Territorial Government, which has now agreed in principle to a similar transfer, to get on, conclude this transfer for the Yukon as quickly as possible under the authority of this Act and to proclaim that transfer affecting forest and fire management at the earliest possible date on which it can be done. I say to the Minister, and again to the Member from the Western Arctic, that what we are doing today is a correct, progressive and welcome step for the great north of this country.

Mr. Jim Fulton (Skeena): Mr. Speaker, like the two previous speakers, I am very pleased to speak to Bill C-43, an Act to amend the Territorial Lands Act. It is a timely move on devolution of federally-held powers to NWT and very shortly down the road—I am sure the Minister and others would agree—to Yukon as well. As my friend, the Hon. Member for Cochrane—Superior (Mr. Penner) has pointed out, the Bill we are dealing with today is done without any prejudice whatever to the settlement of comprehensive claims in NWT. This is a legislative mechanism, as other Members have pointed out, for forest management and protection. It adds \$24 annually to the NWT formula and transfers assets in terms of buildings and so on of \$24.5 million. There is no prohibition on the use of funds provided today to the Northwest Territories. I think it is very appropriate that the decisions will now be made by northerners as they see northern forest issues.

One thing I want to flag though, Mr. Speaker, is the three-year period within which the NWT can come back to the federal Government for funds to fight forest fires. Over the last half a dozen years the costs for fighting fires has ranged dramatically from \$3 million to \$18 million, which averages out at about \$8 million a year. As Members of this House