

*Water Resources*

● (5:40 p.m.)

I could mention many more areas which the committee will have to scrutinize very carefully, but I wish to speak more specifically on action the government should take immediately, to which I am sure the House will give its consent. I refer to action which should have been taken several years ago. According to the Minister of Fisheries (Mr. Davis) at present we have an effective tool to deal with the problem of pollution. I quote from one of his speeches:

We are fortunate in that we have a clear-cut avenue for federal participation in the battle against pollution. We are fortunate in that we have an effective tool in the Fisheries Act.

The minister went on to say:

In this country, the nation has full authority over our "sea coast and inland fisheries". It makes our fishery laws and it approves our fishery regulations. True, Ottawa has delegated some of its authority to the provinces in respect to freshwater lakes and rivers. But our provincial government, if they want to make a change in any of our fishery regulations, must first submit them to us for approval. Any change in the Fisheries Act itself of course, is a matter for Parliament alone to decide. Our federal Fisheries Act, in other words, must be updated. It must include a few clauses which are essentially anticipatory in nature. It must not only say what kinds of chemicals can, and which cannot be discharged into Canadian waters, but see to it that our municipalities and our industries are aware of these guidelines ahead of time. It must provide certain penalties for non-compliance, of course.

With a new and amended Fisheries Act, we will no longer have to find dead fish in order to prove our case. We will no longer have to wait until the damage is done to our environment. We will no longer have to discipline maverick companies which themselves have failed to look ahead and to plan for the future. We will no longer have to plead with municipalities to do the right thing for themselves and their citizens.

Being simple and straightforward, it should also be economical in terms of manpower and red tape. So we can use our existing establishment to do a job on pollution, to do it quickly and to do it well.

The minister puts it very plainly. That is a long quotation, but I wanted to put it on the record because according to the minister there is no problem in immediate action being taken by the government to control pollution of our waters. Why hasn't some action been taken in the past, or why is it not being taken now?

Since May 30, 1969, when the minister delivered his speech, why has not the department drafted the necessary legislation to update the Fisheries Act? This would be

[Mr. Comeau.]

much simpler matter than the bill we are now considering, and it would control pollution of our waters. This bill only talks about water. However, it is much more complicated than that. In fact, it might be so complicated that many Canadian citizens will not know what it is all about. It sounds good, but I am sure there are many who do not realize the complications involved. It does not do away with the red tape.

Of course, the Fisheries Act is concerned only with water, and a more broad approach to pollution is desired. When talking about pollution we must consider more than just water. However, this could be done and would probably be more effective for immediate water pollution. This bill, which is the major piece of legislation concerning pollution that the government has introduced, could then encompass pollution in all its aspects. The bill is not really attacking or getting at the root of the problem of pollution because, it concerns itself only with water. According to the Minister of Fisheries, effective action could be taken under the Fisheries Act. This bill might create more red tape and confusion. I do not understand how it will cut out the interdepartmental maze that now exists between the various departments of government.

The problem of pollution is national as well as regional and local. Co-ordinated national action is required to combat this national problem. One of the greatest failures of the present government is its failure to realize this fact and take the appropriate action. Consequently, the attack on pollution, water and air, has been frustrated by the action of numerous intergovernmental and intragovernmental agencies and bodies. Every department spends money in the field of pollution, but nobody can tell us exactly how much.

The Progressive Conservative Party has long recognized the need for co-ordinated action in pollution control and has repeatedly proposed the establishment of a single federal agency called the Canada Pollution Abatement Commission, reporting to Parliament through the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Greene) with the single purpose of providing technical and financial assistance in pollution control to existing agencies in the federal, provincial, municipal and industrial fields. The purpose of such an agency would be the undertaking of research programs and the co-ordination of existing