

*Government Orders*

able development. For instance, the commissioner will assess the effectiveness of action plans in meeting the objectives set out in departmental sustainable development strategies.

Second, the commissioner will follow up in the prescribed manner any petition received from a resident of Canada about an environmental matter in the context of this so-called sustainable development.

Third, the commissioner will make any examinations and inquiries that he deems necessary to monitor the extent to which each department has met the objectives set out in its own sustainable development strategy.

Finally, he will, on behalf of the auditor general, report annually to the House of Commons on the extent to which each department implemented its sustainable development plan and on anything in relation to the environment that he considers should be brought to the attention of the House.

I think it is important at this juncture to repeat to this House the comments made by Auditor General Denis Desautels when he appeared before the Environment and Sustainable Development Committee on October 3.

At that time he said the following—and I shall quote him extensively because I think that the Auditor General has put his finger right on the fundamental problem in this matter.

I shall be quoting from several pages of Mr. Desautels' testimony. He said: "When I last appeared before this Committee, I also touched on the expectations of stakeholders regarding what was then termed an "Environmental Auditor General". I remain concerned about the extent of these expectations". He continued. "I sense there could be a gap between what stakeholders, such as environmental groups, would like or hope the Commissioner can do and what is reality, both in terms of mandate and available resources. It will be important in the months ahead to ensure that this expectation gap is minimized. For my part, I will try to do this by clearly describing this new role and the impact of these proposed changes on my Office at the first appropriate opportunity, in one of our reports to Parliament. I would, however, like to briefly discuss three of the areas where this expectation gap might exist".

"When I spoke to this Committee in March 1994, I discussed the importance of the independence and objectivity of this Office as underpinnings to the credibility it has established since its creation in 1878".

"I noted that responsibility for such matters as policy review and arbitrating environmental disputes should not be given to my Office, as this could quickly and seriously jeopardize the AG's traditional independence, objectivity and credibility".—I think that we can agree with Mr. Desautels on that.

"In Canada, it is generally accepted that legislative auditors do not observe on the merits of policy. They concentrate their

comments on the implementation of policy".—policy defined by others, including this House.

"I might also mention that our work with other Auditors General worldwide, indicates that the majority of my colleagues outside Canada interpret their mandate in this manner. The proposed amendments to the AG Act make no provision for the Office to comment on the merits of policy and we will not do so".

• (1610)

I would like to intervene at this point. We see that the auditor general made it clear that he will not be involved in formulating policies but in enforcing policies formulated by others.

Mr. Desautels continued to discuss his role as ombudsman or what that role would be expected to be: Similarly, there is also no basis in the proposed amendments, nor in the Office's current mandate, for the Office to take on the role of Ombudsperson. Such a role would be costly and could likely have a negative impact on the credibility of the Office of the Auditor General and the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development".

He also talked about jurisdictions, saying: "Finally, the mandate of the Office of the Auditor General, including that of the proposed Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, is restricted to the responsibilities of the federal government. Neither myself nor the Commissioner have or will have any authority to address matters that fall outside federal jurisdiction. I think it is important to mention here that the mandate and functions of this Office, including those of the Commissioner—and I underlined what Mr. Desautels said in my text,—cannot be a substitute for strong government leadership and departmental management action and accountability. This of course applies equally to both environmental and non-environmental programs and activities".

"It remains the responsibility of departmental management to review their programs, to assess their success and continuing relevance and to determine whether there are cost effective alternatives. The results of these revisions are essential ingredients to managing programs wisely and providing information for accountability reporting".

"The government's Guide to Green Government, issued in June of this year, states that departments are required to report annually on progress towards sustainable development in Part III of their Man Estimates. The document also notes that this regular reporting of activities and performance in the Main Estimates will make on going monitoring and self-assessment a necessity. The management of individual departments, as part of their responsibilities, will therefore have to monitor and evaluate their own progress. This is a fundamental responsibility of management, whether in the private or public sectors".

"We have seen as a result of our work on program evaluation, how difficult it is for government to implement good effectiveness measurement and reporting".