

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTION PERIOD**

[English]

DISASTERS**REQUEST THAT INQUIRY INTO SINKING OF "OCEAN RANGER"
DRILLING RIG BE HELD IN PUBLIC**

Mr. Pat Nowlan (Annapolis Valley-Hants): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Transport, and it arises out of the tabling of the terms of reference for the inquiry into the sinking of the *Ocean Ranger*. They were tabled in the House on Thursday night. Would the minister assure the House that the inquiry will be held in public, with a report which will be public and, regardless of the high seas aspect of this tragedy, that relevant, compellable witnesses will be called to testify on all matters, including any evidence of prior notice concerning the seaworthiness of and the safety procedures on the rig?

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): Madam Speaker, the difficulty is that the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources and I are both partly in charge of that inquiry, in the sense that it was created under the Inquiries Act and also under the Canada Shipping Act. I think I can answer "yes" to all the questions, as I heard them. This will be a public hearing. There will be a public report and witnesses will be heard. What was the fourth aspect?

INQUIRY RESPECTING PRIOR WARNINGS

Mr. Pat Nowlan (Annapolis Valley-Hants): My supplementary question really relates to the last part of my first question as to whether the terms of reference were wide enough to include any prior notice of seaworthiness of or the safety procedures on the rig. I would like to know whether, prior to the tragic sinking, there was any communication, letter or report to the government or to any of its agencies warning about the seaworthiness and safety procedures of the *Ocean Ranger* and, if so, what action was taken?

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): The answer is that to the best of our knowledge, no, there was no such communication.

**REQUEST FOR HOLDING OF JOINT FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL
INQUIRY**

Hon. John C. Crosbie (St. John's West): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources. As I understand the situation, the government of Newfoundland sent a message to the minister last Friday, proposing a joint inquiry with respect to the tragic sinking of the *Ocean Ranger*. The government of Newfoundland has suggested that the commission of inquiry of the federal government be combined with the royal commission of the Newfoundland government and that they have joint terms of reference. It has suggested that there be one federal-provincial royal commission with the Honourable Gordon Winter and the

Honourable Chief Justice Hickman as co-chairmen, and that the federal government could appoint other commissioners if it so wished. It has also suggested that the report may be made public.

Has the government now considered this request from the government of Newfoundland that there should be a joint inquiry? Has there been a favourable consideration of that? If so, when will the necessary changes be made so that we can have a joint inquiry? I might add that this would conform with the wishes of all of the religious denominations of Newfoundland, as expressed by Archbishop Penney last Friday.

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): Madam Speaker, the Government of Canada did offer the proposal of a joint inquiry to the government of Newfoundland last week. My executive assistant phoned the government of Newfoundland on my behalf to propose such an inquiry. Unfortunately, this offer was not taken up, and the government of Newfoundland decided to go ahead with its own inquiry.

This morning I received the telex which the minister responsible for energy in Newfoundland sent us on the weekend. We have not had time to examine the situation. I will discuss this matter with my cabinet colleagues and I will give our answer in the next few days. I might just point out to the hon. member, however, that there are limits to the number of commissioners who should be envisaged, and we will look at this matter.

TIMING OF DECISION

Hon. John C. Crosbie (St. John's West): Madam Speaker, I am not too concerned about who suggested the joint inquiry first. However, let me tell the minister that there was no suggestion, I am advised by the government of Newfoundland, from him or the federal government that there should be a joint inquiry; rather, all that was done was to contact the government of Newfoundland to ask whether they had any views to give on the terms of reference. The minister appointed and announced a federal commissioner last Tuesday, in this House. However, putting that aside for the moment, the government of Newfoundland has now proposed a joint inquiry, which is the wish of the people of Newfoundland. The majority of the people who were lost on that rig were Newfoundlanders. The people of Newfoundland want both governments involved in a full public investigation of this tragic event to ensure that every possible angle is covered.

● (1420)

There have been joint chairmen of commissions before. I remind the minister of the bilingualism and biculturalism commission of some years ago. Also, it would only make a total of six commissioners if the federal government wanted to appoint two additional commissioners. Can the minister tell the House when the government will make its decision? Could it be within the next 24 or 48 hours, in view of the very deep feelings about this whole matter in the province of Newfound-