

Oral Questions

Prince Edward Island, and I intend to continue those meetings, which will also include my colleagues in New Brunswick.

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[English]

ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS**SOUTH MORESBY—SALMON RIVER WATERSHED—DRILLING FOR MINERALS**

Hon. Chas. L. Caccia (Davenport): Mr. Speaker, in the absence of the Minister of the Environment my question is directed to the Deputy Prime Minister. The British Columbia Government has just authorized Diamond Resources to begin drilling and exploration for minerals in the Salmon River watershed, a pristine wilderness within the South Moresby National Park Reserve presently under negotiation.

What is the Government doing to stop this insane decision and to protect South Moresby?

Hon. Thomas Siddon (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to respond to this question on behalf of the Minister of the Environment.

If the Hon. Member would look at the Memorandum of Understanding which was entered into between Canada and British Columbia in July of last year, it clearly indicates that areas which are presently the subject of existing mining claims, which have not been under development, are excluded from the area designated as a national park reserve.

This Government is proud of the decision to recognize in perpetuity the precious values that South Moresby Island represents by declaring a national park. We have taken provisions in concert with the Government of the Province of British Columbia to preserve that area in that fashion.

I repeat, the areas where this particular mining claim is being pursued, are not contained within the area designated as park reserve at this time.

POSITION OF HAIDA PEOPLE

Hon. Chas. L. Caccia (Davenport): Mr. Speaker, I am not so sure I would be as proud as the Minister for having arrived at an agreement which excludes mineral rights and exploration. It is a shame that they did. The agreement should have excluded such rights in a manner such as to protect the integrity of this pristine area.

Since the Haida people are quoted as having decided to put their lives on the line to stop the mining, what will the Government of Canada do to match this type of commitment?

Hon. Thomas Siddon (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Speaker, to hear the Hon. Member speak, one might expect that he would wish all of British Columbia or all of Canada to be placed in a national park reserve.

In fact the two Governments were very conscious of the existence of pre-existing mining claims in the area of South Moresby Island. For that reason, in May of last year the Government of British Columbia placed a moratorium on the issuance of any further claims. The number of mining claims on the Queen Charlottes has dropped from 25 per cent to 8 per cent in the last several years. These areas are excluded from the area designated as a national park reserve. Any activity on those lands will be subject to provincial and federal environmental legislation.

NATIONAL PARK RESERVE

Ms. Lynn McDonald (Broadview—Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister, who was vitally involved in the negotiations to establish the national park reserve at South Moresby. Canadians cheered when that happened thinking that the land was going to be saved from logging. People think that perhaps they cheered too soon, if that same land is now going to be wrecked by mining.

Does the Prime Minister not agree that mining is totally inconsistent with a national park reserve, that it is necessary to bring these other areas under the terms of that, that the Memorandum of Understanding very clearly states that British Columbia will hand over all of these rights, that the compensation will be paid indeed, but that we need to have the national park reserve as one which really is a national park reserve and is not a place where mining is going to take place, with or without that type of gerrymandering?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the arrangement worked out between the Government of Canada and the Government of British Columbia represented a very significant advance in the area of environmental protection. I think that it was quite properly encouraged and celebrated by all Members of the House.

The terms and provisions of the Memorandum of Understanding, and I believe that very distinguished representatives of the New Democratic Party were there and I was grateful for their presence at that time, were widely known and appreciated. We have insisted vigorously upon the enforcement of each and every one of those provisions. We shall continue to do so.

The Government of Canada's position was very clear from the beginning, and remains that way today. We are unaware of anything that has taken place inconsistent with the fundamental provisions of the undertaking that we signed.

NATIONAL PARKS POLICY

Ms. Lynn McDonald (Broadview—Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the Prime Minister would comment on the national parks policy which very clearly states: "Commercial exploration, extraction or development of natural resources which exists prior to the establishment of a new national park will be terminated before..." the establishment.