

Her botched and dicey decision could have caused irreparable damage to the environment. This partisan political game she has played is inexcusable.

• (1240)

This threat that hung over the Gulf of St. Lawrence throughout the month of August was a matter of continual concern for those directly involved.

Speaking of those directly involved, the hon. member for Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine has been conspicuously reserved over the summer with his dear constituents who, all summer long, were completely shattered by this decision to lift the ship in that manner.

The media actually covered the operations, that they questioned on many occasions. The work was conducted haphazardly and without any degree of certainty. In a nutshell, it smacked of amateurism, and that had many people worried.

I certainly hope that the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development, whose position Bill C-83 seeks to establish, will have a say in this kind of decisions, which directly threatens the environment. The commissioner will be in a position to monitor the whole decision making process.

In the case of the *Irving Whale*, the process followed was seriously flawed, thus preventing an appropriate decision, that is the best possible one. Indeed, the process followed regarding the *Irving Whale* was flawed in several ways.

At the end of 1992, two studies commissioned by the Coast Guard and by the Department of the Environment recommended pumping the cargo out of the sunken wreck. Marex and CEF both concluded that was the safest technique.

However, the government ignored the recommendations made in studies which it commissioned. Instead, the Minister of the Environment relied on a third study commissioned by an independent organization, the Ship-source Oil Pollution Fund, which recommended lifting the barge without emptying it and moving it to a safe place before pumping the oil out.

It should be noted that this study conducted by London's Murray Fenton firm used the two above-mentioned studies as its main references. How could this third firm go against the findings of the other two if it used their studies as its basic reference? At that stage, the process was very twisted to say the least. All this does not seem very logical.

What we can figure out however is the logic relating to the costs of the operation. In spite of the reassuring words of the minister, it is clear that the costs of the operation unduly influenced the decision making process. Indeed, the government chose the least expensive solution. Bloc Quebecois members and environmental groups have always said that the government should first pump the oil out of the barge.

Government Orders

Public hearings and consultations were held following the minister's decision, but the whole process was obviously a sham. Surely, the commissioner of the environment will be able to take a close look at such decisions.

Then we found out that PCBs were present in the wreck. The government says "What a surprise—we did not know." Yet page 3 of chapter I of the Marex report submitted to the government in December 1992 states that the capacity of the heaters "was transmitted to the cargo via a heating fluid (Monsanto MGS 295S) and heating coils in each tank". Thus the presence of PCBs was already mentioned in the 1992 documents.

So, in June 1995, another environmental assessment and consultations were carried out, this time not only fabricated but hastily fabricated at that. The outcome: a federal court judge issues a stop order and makes the Minister of the Environment do her homework all over again, this time conforming to her own department's statutes and regulations. That is something else, Mr. Speaker. What a blow to the pride of our Minister of the Environment, who had boasted only a few months earlier that she had settled the whole thing.

So the work was stopped by an injunction, work that had been delayed continuously and had already used up its budget. They say that it would cost between \$150 000 and \$180 000 a day to go on with the project.

• (1245)

And while all this flagrant bungling was going on, those in charge of the Coast Guard and Environment Canada were telling us "No problem. This is a well-oiled operation". Never were words so well chosen, for the whole danger of this controversial operation lay in its "well-oiled" nature.

We are continuing to follow this issue very closely and are anxious to see what the minister's next steps will be. I have drawn a parallel between this issue and Bill C-83, an act to amend the Auditor General Act, since the purpose of that bill is to create a position of commissioner of the environment responsible for overseeing situations like that of the *Irving Whale*.

It gives me pleasure to take the floor, because this bill arises from the dissenting opinion expressed by the Bloc Quebecois in the May 1995 report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development on the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development.

As a result of the committee's work on this subject, the Bloc members proposed three essential criteria in the creation of the position of environmental auditor. They are as follows. First, it is the government's responsibility to establish the policies and the auditor's to examine them. Second, we must avoid creating more organizations with similar mandates. Third, economic and environmental elements must be intrinsically linked.