

Request for Skagit River Valley Study

two official languages the text of the Skagit River reference which has been jointly agreed upon by the governments of Canada and the United States and is being formally communicated by the two governments to the International Joint Commission.

Hon. Jack Davis (Minister of Fisheries and Forestry): Mr. Speaker, my colleague the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Sharp) has just tabled the text of a joint reference by the governments of Canada and the United States to the International Joint Commission. In this joint reference our two governments ask the International Joint Commission to study the environmental consequences of further flooding in the Skagit River Valley in British Columbia. This study is concerned with the ecology of the Skagit Valley and the consequences, in environmental terms, of raising the Ross dam in the state of Washington.

The International Joint Commission has been asked to report on the nature, scope and impact of the raising of the dam and to recommend measures for the protection and enhancement of the local environment, all of this to be consistent with its order of approval given for the raising of the Ross dam back in 1942.

It is becoming increasingly clear that decisions to build dams and raise water levels should be taken after there has been a thorough investigation of the environmental consequences. Since the Skagit River flows across the international boundary, the Canadian government has a special responsibility in this regard.

There is widespread concern about the environmental consequences of raising the Ross dam in my own home province of British Columbia. In our discussions with the United States we found that the U.S. government was also sympathetic to this concern and it agreed that the best way to proceed was to request the International Joint Commission to organize and carry out a detailed study on the basis of which it would make recommendations to all concerned. The International Joint Commission has a long tradition of helping our two countries to resolve problems along our boundary and it is experienced in dealing with environmental questions in boundary water areas.

It is the usual practice of the International Joint Commission, in carrying out investigations of this kind, to draw on the expertise of governments at the federal, provincial and state levels. The Canadian government will, of course, be glad to make available to the International Joint Commission such information and staff as the IJC may request in this connection.

I expect that the International Joint Commission, in accord with its normal procedures, will hold public hearings prior to making its recommendations to government. It will, of course, be up to the commission to announce the timing and location of these hearings. These hearings will provide an opportunity for private groups and individual citizens to make their views heard.

I might add that I have informed the Minister of Lands, Forests and Water Resources of British Columbia

[Mr. Sharp.]

about this reference to the International Joint Commission and he has told me that his government supports this inquiry.

It is my hope that this study by the International Joint Commission can be launched without delay. Because a good deal of information is already available I also expect that the IJC will be able to complete its investigations and make its recommendations to the Canadian and United States governments before the end of October, 1971.

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, when the minister speaks of concern in his native province about the flooding of the Skagit valley he is certainly not exaggerating; in fact, in my opinion he is indulging somewhat in understatement. If I may express a personal opinion, I think it would be a great misfortune if this valley were flooded. The proposal to do so obviously results from a decision made in former days when the preservation of the valley did not seem to be of very much consequence, but today it does not seem to me good economic sense to flood the valley for the purpose described, and certainly in terms of environmental considerations it does not seem to make any sense at all.

Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, we have to consider the significance of the reference to the International Joint Commission upon which the two governments have agreed. The commission is asked to make recommendations for the protection and enhancement of the environment not inconsistent with its order of approval of 1942, and the agreement between Seattle and the province of British Columbia of 1967. In other words, Mr. Speaker, it seems very clear that the International Joint Commission is not even asked to make any recommendations involving the withdrawal of permission to flood the Skagit Valley. The only recommendations that the commission is authorized to make under this reference concern the protection and enhancement of the environment consistent with the authorization granted in 1942.

It is quite interesting to read the reference with some care, Mr. Speaker. In the first paragraph it says:

The commission is requested
(a) to investigate the environmental and ecological consequences—

Of the flooding, and so on. These are quite broad investigative procedures. The second paragraph invites the International Joint Commission:

—to report on the nature, scope and impact of these consequences;

This could be quite a broad reference in terms of investigation and reporting.

But the significant and important paragraph is that authorizing the commission to make recommendations. Clearly the recommendations seem to be limited to recommendations which are consistent with the order of approval dated January 27, 1942. Therefore I have to ask the minister whether my impression is wrong when I draw the conclusion from these terms of reference that the International Joint Commission is not authorized to