

Water Resources

result of pollution making the shellfish unfit for human consumption. I have experience in this matter, Mr. Speaker, because in my constituency a good clam-digging operation had to be stopped because the beds were contaminated. It becomes a vicious circle. Pollution leads to higher costs for everyone. Fish-processing plants have been forced to bring in water from far out at sea because of local pollution.

To show hon. members how serious the situation is, let me tell them that the Atlantic Development Board has subsidized operations like this. I am not blaming it; I am merely telling hon. members what is happening in order to show them how much concern there is over this matter.

The west coast salmon and herring fisheries add about \$70 million to our economy each year and governments have taken great pains to ensure that power projects and pollution do not interfere with the lives of these fish. But the recent—when I say recent I am talking about last year—Placentia Bay experience should prove to us all that we cannot be complacent about past successes.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Comeau: New developments are bringing danger from oil pollution. I am not talking only about oil tankers travelling in the north but also about offshore drilling. The Department of Fisheries and Forestry should supervise these operations. It should not stop progress in oil discoveries, but it should protect our fisheries. Nowadays some of our best fishing grounds are being examined in the search for oil. There is a danger of pollution here. The Department of Fisheries and Forestry should carefully supervise these activities and make sure that the waters are not contaminated.

Let us look at the related problem of freshwater fisheries. There are many lines that we could follow here. Problems of pollution for commercial fishermen on our big lakes need no elaboration. The problem is much larger than that, however. We cherish our outdoor life and recreation; but who enjoys fishing in water he cannot bear to smell? There are hidden costs which governments must weigh and act upon.

I could talk about other areas, such as agriculture and what has happened with regard to pesticides and the cost of providing good and clean drinking water. That also is

becoming a problem. Pollution is a testament to a collective failure of man to live in harmony with his environment.

We have had many conferences and studies and, unfortunately, need more. Despite all its protestations of concern, this government has until recently remained pathetically inactive. Its cry of "We have got to do something", is becoming political jargon. Oh, yes, we have the Water Act. When we have argued our case over the past two years, or talked about pollution, the minister or member responsible for matters of pollution has come forward and said, "Why not wait until the water act is passed?". For the past two years we have advocated such a measure, and now it is on the statute books.

I do not wish to repeat all the arguments that were raised in the previous debate. Although there are some good provisions in the act, it does not, to my mind, alleviate immediate problems associated with pollution—and I am speaking not only of water pollution but of air and soil pollution. In my opinion, the fastest action the government can take under this legislation is the setting up of water quality management agencies.

I would not be too critical of this step being taken on a long-term basis. The act does not provide for the solution of immediate problems to do with pollution. It makes no provision for minimum standards relating to water quality, which I think are absolutely essential. We must have across-Canada minimum standards applicable to water quality. While there is a good argument for having different standards in the various regions of Canada, minimum standards should be spelled out and adhered to. In fact, it is still open for one province or region to encourage industry because of lower standards of pollution control. I am aware that the minister has marshalled arguments to counteract this statement. He says that we have the act. I suggest that the committee should look carefully at suggested amendments that deal with points I have raised.

Of course, the provinces know that federal involvement involves a financial commitment. When you talk to the provinces and want to get them involved in anything, the first thing you hear mentioned is money. Here there is no firm commitment of funds from the federal treasury. The control of pollution involves funds, Mr. Speaker. This point could be summed up by saying, "You either put up or shut up."