

Request for Environmental Council

tion, particularly sewage waters which are discharged into waterways that are frighteningly becoming polluted. The more we hesitate, the more tax money we will have to pay.

I would like that the problem prevailing in the Eastern Townships be considered. In the St-Francois river which runs through my riding at the level of Drummondville, the water does not run any more; it is so polluted by the sewage poured into it by some 120 villages and towns in Quebec that it just rolls down.

A study made by the Quebec Water Board showed that close to 270,000 people live on the banks of the St-François or its tributaries. The river is polluted at East Angus, Sherbrooke, Bromptonville, Windsor and Drummondville. Those towns should stop pouring their waste water into that river and, to that end, the federal government, in co-operation with the Quebec government, should grant those municipalities interest-free loans in order to put an end to such pollution, which is intolerable in 1972.

[English]

Hon. Jack Davis (Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Kootenay West (Mr. Harding) for giving me this opportunity to say a few words about the environment, about Environment Canada, about our federal programs and the manner in which these federal initiatives are co-ordinated effectively with those of the provinces.

His motion expresses the view that, "in order to protect and preserve our environment, immediate national standards for environmental quality must be set for air, water and land." I want to stay close to the main point that he is endeavouring to make. Mr. Speaker, we have been in the process of setting not only national standards but also national objectives.

When I mention objectives I am, for example, talking about the quality of the water out in the middle of a lake, or about the quality of large masses of air over a city. Standards, by contrast, apply to the point of effluence, of pollutants from their source. To repeat, Mr. Speaker, we have already announced a series of national air quality objectives. We have also been announcing a series of standards, which we are working out in close concert with the industries concerned.

We have by no means covered all the industries with which we must work and for which national standards must be set. But in answer to that part of the motion which says that Canada must preserve its environment by setting immediate national standards for environmental quality for air, water and land, I have to say that we are already in the process of doing this. It may take longer to do this job than the hon. member would like to admit. However, we have been working closely with half a dozen major industries.

In two cases we have already announced what these new standards are. These are standards which the industry concerned knows it can meet. They are standards where we have good working examples of pollution abatement procedures being adequate to meet all reasonable tests. They are also economic standards because we can point to plants or mills which are in effect making money and which have installed the necessary clean-up equip-

[Mr. Beaudoin.]

ment and procedures, and are operating them in an economic way.

The hon. member says that these standards must be set for all pollutants. I will have to agree with him on that. However, it will take us time to work reasonably with the industries concerned to develop a description of the latest working technology. We intend to cover all pollutants, and we will be working with all polluting industries with a view to cleaning up their effluents.

The hon. member also says that these standards must be enforced by federal authorities. Mr. Speaker, he knows very well that the federal authority in many of these fields is not all inclusive. For example, he knows the provinces have specific power over property, and power over the location of many industries. He knows that the provinces have the only powers to deal effectively with local pollution which, in its detrimental influence, does not extend to surroundings which are outside a province, or which does not affect fish, navigation or human health, which are matters of federal concern. There are big areas of jurisdiction in this country which rest exclusively with the provinces.

In those areas, for instance in municipal affairs, in respect to industries located entirely within a province and whose pollutant effects do not go outside the province, it is really the provincial authority that must deal with them. However, having said this, Mr. Speaker, it is our intention, and we have been fairly successful to this point, to develop standards which the provinces will adopt, standards which the provinces will in fact copy, and which they will enforce. Even in areas of exclusively provincial or local jurisdiction we will not have pollution havens which will serve to attract certain "dirty" industries, or will permit some firms to get away with practices which would not be allowed in areas of federal jurisdiction or where the provinces adopt federal standards.

• (1550)

I think the hon. member would also be prepared to admit that where the federal standards are improved upon by a given province or municipality, the federal government should have no reluctance in immediately endorsing enthusiastically those higher standards. It may be that standards are not always uniform across the country. But certainly the national government must be able to set national standards which are uniform in so far as the force and effect of federal laws are concerned and to ensure that those are also standards which are met or exceeded in the provinces and by provincial administrations.

It is proposed in this resolution that low cost loans must be made available to municipalities and to certain industries to ensure no further delay in clean-up. I should certainly like the hon. member to list the "certain industries" to which he would give this preferential treatment. This would be a very interesting exercise, especially so far as the New Democratic Party is concerned. If we are to be selective, what industries should receive financial assistance from the government? In other words, what industries should receive a subsidy from the federal taxpayer in order to clean up?