

*Government Orders*

In addition, there has been reference in the House to the question as to what we mean by the term "sustainable development". I would draw attention to page 6 of the bill where sustainable development is defined. It means development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Now most members present will recognize that wording, of course, because it is borrowed in a sense from a greater authority than the members of the committee.

But we have, indeed, turned back to the Brundtland commission and there is a direct linkage between the purposes of the bill, the definition of sustainable development as contained in the bill, and the issue which is at hand.

One thing that is very clear as a result of some of the discussions which took place in committee is that the bill is more tightly drafted than it was initially.

As a consequence, the determination that significant adverse environmental effects are justifiable can now only be made after a panel review or mediation, and not after a screening or a comprehensive study. That is a tighter drafting than existed initially.

Furthermore, the minister has been given the power to set out criteria on what this terminology "justified in the circumstances" means. He has been provided with that within the context of Bill C-13.

Indeed, he is committed to ensuring that decisions under this clause are made within the principles of sustainable development. And in that I am simply repeating my earlier remarks.

How the term "sustainable development" is interpreted by the department will be set out in a guideline on "justifiable" to be prepared under clause 58. That too is a result of discussions which took place in committee.

In our minds, to go further than that at this particular time, to establish the direct legal connection as the hon. member would wish us to do, in our opinion would be to give the courts more of a role in the definition of the term "sustainable development" than we would think is advisable.

The reason I say that is because we are very conscious of the fact, as others have said earlier in the day, that in a

very real sense the concept of environmental protection is still in a state of evolution, as indeed is the technology by which we would seek to protect that environment.

So, while we have used in this bill the clearest and most commonly accepted definition of "sustainable development" available to us at this time, it is equally clear that at some point in the future—and in the area of environmental protection it is difficult to know whether the future be two years down the road or four years or ten years, as the case may be—it may well be that the definition that is in place and is accepted at that point in time perhaps would be different or could at least be a variation from that which exists today.

And so, I would prefer the legislators of the land—in this case the Parliament of Canada—be given the task of defining sustainable development, accepting as we do the fact that this is an evolving definition.

We have heard various suggestions today as to who is going to be the Government of Canada in two years or four years or six years. Some of the parties have indicated their aspirations to have that responsibility; others who are in the House have not yet indicated they see that as being part of their expectations. But it is clear that politicians, elected representatives, are in the best position to accept this responsibility today, rather than to pass the buck, the responsibility, on to the courts.

In doing so, we are accepting a system whereby we are giving that responsibility to those who are accountable.

• (1640)

Certainly one of the things I find frustrating, and certainly my constituents find frustrating, is the fact that very often important decisions are made by jurisdictions over which they have no control. Politicians are accountable and we are held accountable for this legislation. We are held accountable as a government for what we proposed and we will be held accountable if it is passed, as indeed I hope and expect it will be.

I am comfortable with that concept of accountability. I am also very, very conscious of the fact that, as I said earlier, in a sense the terms we have before us are not scientific; they are changing. It may very well be that when we revisit this bill, as indeed we understand will undoubtedly happen at some point in the future, we can