

Government Orders

As indicated earlier, Bill C-48 will establish the Department of Natural Resources and provide the legal framework within which it will operate.

• (1630)

The department's mandate will be defined in one document rather than in the two acts now in effect, namely the Department of Forestry Act and the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources Act.

Sustainable development is very important. My colleague from Edmonton Northwest has indicated that one of the challenges facing the natural resource sector is Canada's progress toward sustainable development. Our ability to integrate our economic and environmental goals at all levels of natural resource management is essential if Canada is to become more competitive in this sector. Bill C-48 confirms the government's commitment to this objective.

[English]

The natural resources sector is important. The statistics quoted earlier by my hon. colleague, the Minister of Natural Resources, proves that natural resource industries provide a major contribution to Canada's gross domestic product, our trade surplus and job creation in our country. Over 500 communities depend on natural resource activity to sustain their economy. As well, our natural resource industries are high tech industries. Canada has a well-deserved reputation as a leader in the development and application of technology to improve the productivity and competitiveness of mining, forest and energy industries. It is through our expertise in this area that new technologies have emerged.

New technology has also created new industries in Canada. For example, as the minister has pointed out, Canada's requirement for accurate information on our land mass, such as maps of our geography, has stimulated new industries like geomatics. Already, this burgeoning industry employs 12,000 Canadians and exports \$100 million each year.

The role of Natural Resources Canada. The Department of Natural Resources has developed a solid reputation for its research and technology expertise over many years. It is this expertise that has and will continue to bridge industrial and environmental concerns facing natural resource industries. Over the years the work of Natural Resources Canada has led to improved resource sector competitiveness and environmental performance.

Earlier, my hon. colleague the minister described some of the department's work in forest development, innovative mining processes and energy efficiency. These examples demonstrate how Natural Resources Canada is positioned to bridge the industrial and environmental concerns facing the natural resource sector.

[Translation]

In summary, the Department of Natural Resources will continue to promote sustainable development practices, will apply its scientific and technological expertise to the enhancement of our international trade and will increase the natural resource sector's contribution to economic growth and job creation.

Bill C-48 will establish the Department of Natural Resources and help Canadians understand the department's role as an intermediary—that word is extremely important—in bridging industrial and environmental concerns.

Under Bill C-48, the Minister and the Department of Natural Resources will have a mandate to work with the provinces, industry, environmental and aboriginal groups, and other stakeholders to ensure that Canada's natural resource sector continues to prosper now and in future years.

I listened earlier to the speech by my colleague from Matapédia—Matane and I was very surprised, to say the least, by how he approached the presentation of this bill. First of all, he limited his comments almost exclusively to the constitutional aspect, that is, the Constitution as it applies to this bill. He accused the federal government of meddling in Quebec's business.

I would like to take this opportunity to put that allegation in context. To start with, there was the 1992 Canada-Quebec Agreement on Forest Development providing for \$136 million over five years. The hon. member for Matapédia—Matane said that Quebec had never signed such a document. We are talking about an amount of \$136 million made up of equal contributions from each government, that is \$68 million.

• (1635)

In the case of the Eastern Quebec Development Plan, the total amount of \$68 million was paid by the federal government, as was also the case with the \$10.5-million Indian reserve land program.

My point is this: under the Charlottetown accord, the forestry sector was to become an exclusive jurisdiction of the provinces. But as you know, the province of Quebec rejected the accord.

The second point I want to make is that the two existing acts, namely the Forestry Act and the Energy Administration Act, remain almost intact. In other words, the federal government participates in the financing of management activities related to those two natural resources sectors, but does not in any way interfere with the actual administration of the two programs.

I have a message for the hon. member, who might want to transmit it to the new Quebec government. If the federal contributions which I just mentioned are unacceptable and are perceived to be a form of interference, then the Quebec government can send them back, because we can certainly use them elsewhere. I know what I am talking about; while Quebec