

*Government Orders*

The government has taken a red book commitment and engaged Parliament and Canadians in fulfilling it. Contrary to what the Bloc member who spoke said, it was a commitment in our red book and not one of their ideas.

I look forward to Bill C-83 becoming law and to the appointment of a strong and independent commissioner.

[Translation]

**Mr. Roger Pomerleau (Anjou—Rivière-des-Prairies, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, It is with great pleasure that I rise to address Bill C-83, an Act to amend the Auditor General Act.

This bill seeks to achieve five specific objectives:

First, to ensure that environmental considerations in the context of sustainable development are taken into account in the auditor general's reports to the House of Commons.

Second, to provide for the appointment—as suggested by the Bloc Québécois—of a Commissioner of the environment and sustainable development.

Third, to impose requirements for responding to petitions received by the auditor general about federal environmental matters in the context of sustainable development.

Fourth, to provide for monitoring and reporting to the House of Commons on the activities of departments and the extent to which they have met the objectives and implemented the plans set out in their sustainable development strategies, and for reporting to the House of Commons on petitions.

Fifth, to require that each department's sustainable development strategies be prepared and tabled in the House of Commons.

From a technical point of view, if this bill is passed, a number of measures will have to be taken.

First, an adequate definition of what is meant by "sustainable development" will be necessary.

Second, the mandate of the Commissioner of the environment and sustainable development will have to be properly defined.

Third, we will have to ensure that the process for responding to petitions will adequately meet the requirements of the citizens who submit these petitions.

Finally, we will have to ensure that all departments have sustainable development strategies and that they meet the objectives set therein. This means that a major structure to monitor the activities of all departments will have to be put into place.

I said earlier that the first objective of Bill C-83 was to ensure that environmental considerations in the context of sustainable development are taken into account in the auditor general's reports to the House of Commons. In order to achieve this goal, all stakeholders must agree on a single definition of what sustainable development really means.

Bill C-83 includes such a definition; it says that sustainable development means "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

It is surprising, to say the least, that the Minister of the Environment decided to include this definition in the bill to amend the Auditor General Act, but that she has not yet included it in the Canadian Environmental Protection Act itself.

In her speech to introduce this bill in the House of Commons on September 18, the Minister of the Environment said this: "[—] one of the first departments the office of the commissioner will be looking at is my department, the Department of the Environment. We welcome the opportunity of independent public review because we believe it will accelerate the integration of the two key objectives of sustainable development into the economy".

• (1605)

I hope that, during this review of the department's operations, the commissioner will have the opportunity to set the Minister of the Environment straight about this, because it would indeed not make much sense if the basic legislation respecting the environment in Canada was not the first to include a definition of sustainable development.

The only possible explanation for this is the minister's inability to carry out her responsibilities properly. Several examples come to mind. The *Irving Whale* case is a well-known example, where the minister proved to be unable to deal properly with such a major issue and such a dramatic one, under the circumstances.

In this case, the office of the auditor general would obviously have much to do to meet the first objective of this bill.

The second thing that Bill C-83 does is provide for the appointment of a commissioner of the environment and sustainable development. To this effect, the duties that the future commissioner to the environment and sustainable development is expected to perform are described in clauses 22 and 23.

The following information may be drawn from reading these sections. First, the commissioner in question will report directly to the auditor general, assist the auditor general in the performance of his duties with respect to the environment and sustain-