

*Soil Erosion***PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS--MOTIONS**

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

SOIL EROSION

Hon. Chas. L. Caccia (Davenport) moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should consider the advisability of introducing a coherent, comprehensive policy and plan of action to respond to the threat of soil erosion posed to Canada's agricultural land, as described in "Soil at Risk" and "Soil Degradation in Canada".

He said: I would like to offer some brief historical background to this motion because it is important to put it in an historical context. Some three years ago, the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry undertook to examine soil and water conservation in Canada and reported in June of 1984.

It is interesting to note what Senator Sparrow, the Chairman of that committee, said at the time. He concluded:

The Committee's major purpose in this report is to take the reader on the equivalent of an airplane ride over Canada to make clear what soil degradation is and how serious it is in all regions of the country. By increasing the awareness of this situation the committee hopes to make soil conservation a national issue. Our soils are at risk. Our future is eroding.

He ended with this very important statement:

It is time for action.

Some of the conclusions of the report were that soil conservation cannot be dealt with in isolation from related issues such as water quality, land use in particular, wildlife management or fisheries and forestry. Second, it concluded that existing policies not necessarily directed at soils can have the effect of discouraging good soil management. Third, there is a need for further basic research on the causes and effects of soil degradation. Finally, while information has been and is now available on soil conservation, the transfer of this information and the accompanying technology to the farmer is the real key to a successful conservation effort.

Last year, the Science Council of Canada produced a report with the intent of drawing to Canada's attention the fact that soil degradation is a serious problem. Although the subject requires further research, the Science Council commented, the evidence and opinions collected in all parts of the country indicate that soil degradation endangers Canada's agricultural competitiveness and capability. The economic costs of leaving the problem unresolved, the Science Council concluded, will be high. The problem therefore is not just one for farmers, it affects the wellbeing of all Canadians.

The Science Council went on to point out that its recommendations should be implemented within the context of an integrated land-management program and a national soils policy, both of which are essential if the damage caused by soil degradation throughout Canada's farmlands is to be reversed. The report of the Council which I would dearly like to bring to your attention, Mr. Speaker, elaborates further on the concept

of a national soils policy. It suggests that it is required to provide a framework for evaluating other policy initiatives and to ensure that all government policies foster soil conservation.

The experts tell us that there are five major types of soil degradation: erosion caused by wind and water, soil salinization, the process of acidification of soil, compaction and finally the loss of organic matter. The economics of this process are staggering. Experts are telling us that soil degradation is an insidious problem that occurs in all parts of Canada and that the cost has been estimated at over \$3 million per day or some \$1.3 billion annually, something like 38 per cent of net farm income. As Hon. Members know, for many farmers the cost of soil degradation represents the difference between profit and loss.

The Science Council reports further by saying that the losses from soil degradation on the Prairies now exceed \$1 billion annually and 20 years from now could exceed \$2.7 billion. It says that by the year 2005, the cumulative cost to the Canadian economy could exceed some \$42 billion. This would be the cost to the Canadian economy if we do not put into place a plan of action as called for in my motion.

These losses represent as well the cumulative impact of losses in productivity due to soil degradation and the expenditures by farmers in response to the deterioration of their land by the use of fertilizers, pesticides, drainage, irrigation and so on.

The question that then arises is where are we now? Following the release of these two reports by the Science Council and by the Senate Committee, reports entitled "Soil at Risk" and "The Growing Concern" respectively, there has been some progress in raising public awareness. For example, National Soil Conservation Week which began on April 13 of this year was a useful tool in developing awareness, but only a few concrete actions. For instance, there has been a soil and water environment enhancement program signed by the Province of Ontario with Canada in May of last year. This agreement allocated \$30 million under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement to reducing phosphorous loading into Lake Erie from farm run-off. Soil and water conservation subagreements were written into the agreements between the Government of Canada and the Governments of Manitoba, Prince Edward Island, British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan. I welcome these developments because evidently the fact that soil erosion found its way into ERDA agreements is a good sign.

By and large, these agreements have not included large amounts of money or new programs. The National Agricultural Strategy released in November of this year by the federal Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Wise) and his provincial counterpart devotes one page to soil conservation. If one looks at that document, one must conclude that its three recommendations to establish programs, improve federal-provincial co-ordination and establish local water and soil conservation are beautifully written but where is the political will behind this