

*Government Orders*

In Bill C-78, cabinet decisions are exempted from the legislation. The government has promised that all cabinet documents will have an environmental assessment attached but that only the summaries of these are going to be made public. We are expected to trust the cabinet to do the right thing. When it comes to this cabinet we know that we are going to have to extend that trust a long way to see that that actually happens.

The legislation is discretionary, that is, it is a step backwards from the current guidelines which were ruled as binding on the government by the Rafferty-Alameda Federal Court decision. The member for Skeena made reference to the evidence given by the current chairperson of the Federal Environmental Assessment Review Office, the government's own employee, who suggested that Bill C-78 is actually a step backwards from the Order in Council guidelines that we are currently following.

Another important point is that some very important sections of the bill are left to regulations that have yet to be drafted. It is not even clear what federal legislation comes under the bill or what type of projects will be excluded. A perfect example of that was the questions that were just put by the member for Skeena concerning the application of this legislation to those claims that have been accepted by the Government of Canada, the comprehensive claims process that most members of this House are aware of. The member for Skeena asked the government member on the assumption that these claims and these lands fall under this legislation, what would trigger an environmental assessment review. That is not clear in this legislation. It is not pointed out at all.

I think a perfect example of the point I am making is the Alcan project in British Columbia, which will have tremendous impact on the Carrier Sikanni area. A comprehensive claim was accepted by the Government of Canada. Does that mean that already this government is not following the intent of its own legislation.

I think it is pretty clear that this legislation has a long way to go before it is going to be able to do the kind of work that we have come to expect.

There are two areas that I think point out pretty clearly to the failing of the government to respond and to act as a responsible government as it relates to environmental assessment. The first point is one that I think bears repeating. I mentioned it the other day in the

House, but it is an important point and shows exactly what we have come to expect.

In the forestry committee, I had an opportunity to ask the Minister of Forestry an interesting question. Under the guidelines the Government of Canada, under a federally initiated program, is required to do its own internal assessment. I said to the minister: "The forest agreements are an important component of environmental and forestry legislation and programs between this government and the governments of the provinces. Do you have any initial assessments done of these agreements such that you could provide them to the committee so that we could take a look at them on the argument that an assessment here would say that these forest agreements are good for Canada."

The minister said, "No, that has not been done." That is shocking in its first statement, in any case. But he was corrected later by his officials who tugged at his sleeves said: "Mr. Minister, we actually did do an assessment." Of course, I said: "Well that's handy. I would like to see them. Could you provide the committee with these assessments? Let's see how the current Environmental Assessment Review process is being followed by this government."

It took a couple of letters from the clerk of the committee to request those assessments, and lo and behold, a couple of months later when they got around to checking through all the filing cabinets and to see if they did actually have an assessment, despite saying, yes or no, that they did, we found out it was not done. The minister was right for all the wrong reasons. It points out clearly how the government has failed since it has been in office from 1984 to see that indeed it follows these guidelines. It is a Cabinet order.

What if it had something to do with drug dealers? Would the Cabinet avoid the law, as it has with environmental assessment, if it was related to drug dealers? I think not, and I hope not. But that is an indication of just important I believe the whole environment debate has become and how important the whole question of environmental assessment has become as well.

We need to know the guideposts and the milestones so that we can pursue various projects, be they initiated by this government, joint projects initiated by the Government of Canada and the provinces, or projects initiated, of course, by various companies, local governments, what