

Government Orders

All these interrelated measures will have the effect of making federal departments and agencies, as well as cabinet, more responsible for the environmental impact of their decisions. These measures are an important step in the development of a government-wide environmental culture.

The third feature is the creation and maintenance of a public registry accessible to all stakeholders. This provision will have a positive impact on environmental assessment, as an art and science, a new and growing discipline. With each assessment, more knowledge is gained regarding the complex, symbiotic interrelations between people, development and the environment.

• (1825)

[English]

It is not a static process. It is a living, breathing, interactive one. The use of public registries does more than just provide a rich source of relevant and accessible information for both project proponents and those likely to be impacted by a proposed development.

What is often overlooked is that the public registries provide a means of ensuring the institutional memory acquired in the conduct of the environmental assessment is preserved. Indeed the CEAA reform package we are debating has been carefully crafted with the notion that environmental assessment is a dynamic process firmly in mind.

The fact that we have provided expanded opportunities for public involvement throughout the environmental assessment process speaks eloquently to this point. We have no intention of allowing CEAA to become brittle or irrelevant. Its coming into force constitutes the beginning and not the end of the process of change. All parliamentarians regardless of political stripe have a responsibility to make it work and contribute to its success.

The previous government used words like effective, efficient, fair, open and transparent to describe its intentions vis-à-vis environmental assessment. We on this side of the House have acted quickly and decisively to give effect to those words by improving and proclaiming CEAA.

We have acted because we view sound stewardship over the environment as extremely important. Our actions serve to give real definition to the words. That is why all members of the House can and should support CEAA. We have a responsibility to act for future generations.

Mr. Bill Gilmour (Comox—Alberni, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I compliment the member on his speech.

As we are both on the environment committee, I was curious about his research. I was unable to find the area that deals with ministerial discretion on whether or not to look at a project. I am referring specifically to the Kemano project in British Columbia where the former government basically said it did not need environmental assessment.

Was there anywhere the member looked when he was looking for material for his speech that would cover this in the new bill? I was unable to find any and it leaves me a bit uneasy that the minister still has the discretion to ignore or postpone an assessment.

Mr. DeVillers: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question. As I understand the process the minister will be receiving advice from the environmental assessment agency that is being set up. I would hope that is how the system would work.

As the member well knows, the process provides for the bill to go to committee. These are issues and questions that we can raise at that level before final reading of the bill.

Mr. Len Taylor (The Battlefords—Meadow Lake, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member spoke about the involvement of the current Minister of the Environment and gave her a considerable amount of credit for moving the bill forward when other ministers had been unable to do so.

I agree that the current Minister of the Environment has done what few have been able to do in the past, but I recognize what some of the problems are. One problem is simply that the bill came before cabinet on numerous occasions, just as the regulations came before cabinet on numerous occasions. The minister and others had to argue with other cabinet ministers concerning the ability of the cabinet to move the bill forward. Ministers with economic portfolios have always had a stronger say in cabinet than ministers of the environment.

• (1830)

I wonder if members recognize that one of the amendments provides for the greater authority of cabinet to have the final say on projects; not the panel, not the Minister of the Environment, but cabinet. Is the member prepared at committee to have a look at the structure of cabinet where the economic ministers have a very strong say in the kind of environmental legislation or regulations we have in our country?

Mr. DeVillers: Mr. Speaker, one consideration the member should take into account is that the proclamation and amendment of this bill was in the red book. It was part of the Liberal election platform. All cabinet ministers with economic portfolios or otherwise subscribe to the red book policy.

Mr. Taylor: Yes, but it took a year.