

*Government Orders*

If I were to listen too long to hon. members opposite, I might have to conclude that the successful application of sustainable development in native society could only have been achieved through strong central decision making. But nothing could be further from the truth. The sustainability of native society has always been based firmly on consensus building, on a strong sense of community, on deep respect for the experience of elders, and on individual accountability for decisions and actions, in short, the very principles that I see underpinning the proposed Canadian Environmental Assessment Act.

Self-assessment and the accountability implicit in that concept tend to strike a very responsive cord with native people and with their ideas of sustainable development. I believe that in the environmental assessment process, the self-assessment approach will always be far more effective than one based on central control. By making individual departments and ministers of government responsible for the environmental assessment process, there is the potential to make some real progress towards changing attitudes about the environment and focusing decision-makers on the goal of sustainable development, progress that could never be made in a centralized system.

For example, under the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act decision makers will have to deal directly with the affected public, become sensitive to the public's environmental needs and concerns, and be publicly accountable for the environmental effects of their decisions. They will not be able to hide behind a central environmental authority.

Planners throughout government will have to learn to integrate environmental, social and economic factors, in short, to go beyond the platitudes and learn what sustainable development is really all about.

All departments and agencies of government will have to develop a sense of environmental awareness and stewardship. They will not be able to leave it all to one small sector of the bureaucracy and, in due course, every minister will have to learn to be an environment minister.

An environmental assessment process that puts all of the responsibility and authority for environmental protection in the hands of review panels or environment ministers is not going to move us along the path towards the goal of sustainable development. If anything, it is more likely to lead us rapidly in the opposite direction. What will put us on the path towards sustainable

development is a process that puts environmental assessment responsibility and environmental protection accountability where it really belongs, in the hands of the individual government decision makers who make project decisions on a daily basis and that is exactly what Bill C-78 will do.

There are, of course, a number of other features in Bill C-78 that hold particular interest for native peoples in the country. While the legislation is not intended to define native rights, nor is it appropriate that such rights should be defined in environmental legislation, the bill in fact goes a long way toward recognizing a new partnership in environmental matters between the federal government and the First Nations of Canada.

A good example of this partnership can be found in the sections of the bill dealing with joint panel reviews. For the purposes of environmental assessment, the bill recognizes native land claim administrations and native self-governments as jurisdictions on a par with provinces and foreign governments. In this respect, first nations will have the option of being equal partners with the federal government in assessing the effects of any projects that may affect their joint or separate interests.

As well, provisions are made in Bill C-78 to adapt the environmental assessment process to projects on Indian reserves by means of a special regulations. Such special regulations will be developed co-operatively with First Nations. They will recognize the decision-making responsibilities of native peoples for projects on their reserves. They will also recognize the effective and comprehensive environmental assessment processes that many First Nations and native communities have already developed and put in place to deal with the effects of said projects.

Bill C-78 also contains important new provisions for follow-up and monitoring programs for all major projects. From a native perspective, listening very carefully to what nature has to tell us is a basic prerequisite to a healthy and sustainable society. For too many years, however, modern North American society has been blind to the warning signs that the environment has been trying to give it. Modern society has failed to heed these warning signs because modern society has been unwilling to listen to the environment and face up to the reality of what we have been doing to it. Basically, modern society has failed to stay in touch with the environment on which its livelihood and indeed its very sustainability depends. I have seen this occur on own lands during my own lifetime.