

An Angus Reid poll conducted in May showed that an overwhelming majority of Canadians, 94 per cent, support the idea of federal legislation to protect species at risk. The support for legislation is firm. Seventy-five per cent of Canadians strongly support such legislation and 20 per cent somewhat support it.

Last November the Minister of the Environment released a discussion paper on endangered species legislation in Canada, another one on a proposed national approach to endangered species conservation in April and a series of public workshops were held in May.

In August 1995, with full cabinet approval, the Minister of the Environment released for public comment a legislative proposal to protect endangered species entitled "The Canadian Endangered Species Protection Act: A Legislative Proposal". The legislative proposal was released to ensure that the federal government is doing its part and working co-operatively with other jurisdictions to protect endangered species throughout the country.

The minister encouraged the public to provide comments on the legislative proposal prior to introducing legislation in the House of Commons in the spring. The comments received will help the federal government finalize its plans for protecting endangered species.

The proposed legislation would help prevent wild Canadian species from becoming extinct as a consequence of human activities and mandate the recovery of species where technically and economically feasible. It would apply to species on federal lands and waters or under federal authority.

The proposal arises from discussions with the provinces and territories on a national approach to Canadian endangered species protection. It also responds to the comments, suggestions and briefings made by Canadians at the public consultation workshops held across the country, as well as to the recommendations of a federal endangered species conservation task force. There were also many useful aspects of Bill C-275, which stands in the name of the hon. member for Davenport and was introduced in September 1994, which were also considered in drafting the proposed legislation.

The proposal under consideration by the Minister of the Environment is consistent with the commitment enunciated in the red book which puts forward a vision of society that "protects the long term health and diversity of all species on the planet". The proposed legislation would also clearly demonstrate this government's commitment to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The federal endangered species conservation task force, made up of representatives from environmental groups, industry and industry associations, academia and small business was established by the Minister of the Environment to advise her on the contents of the federal endangered species legislation. The task force reconvened early in October to provide additional advice

on a number of key issues, including the best way to achieve the desired safety net that will ensure that all endangered species in Canada receive the protection they deserve. The task force is expected to provide its report to the Minister of the Environment by mid-November.

The legislative proposal is intended to form the federal component of a comprehensive national safety net for the country's most vulnerable species.

With the co-operation of federal, provincial and territorial governments, the proposed legislation will succeed in providing a strong national approach for the conservation of endangered species.

• (1810)

The proposed legislation will apply to the full extent of federal authority to federally managed species everywhere and federally managed marine areas. The proposed legislation would establish a national listing process for all species in Canada regardless of where they occur.

Federal government actions will not intrude into provincial and territorial responsibilities. The common but differentiated responsibilities of the federal, provincial and territorial governments with respect to endangered species are recognized. The proposed legislation is intended to complement, not contradict, provincial and territorial actions.

The release of the legislative proposal prior to the tabling of a formal bill demonstrates our commitment to protecting Canada's endangered species and our commitment to open and transparent government. The federal government remains committed to working co-operatively with the provinces and territories to develop an effective national approach to endangered species conservation. By taking action at the federal level and getting our own house in order we are demonstrating our commitment to making the national approach work.

Mr. Gurbax Singh Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in support of Bill C-275, an act respecting the protection and rehabilitation of endangered and threatened species proposed by my hon. colleague, the member for Davenport.

The protection of endangered flora and fauna must be a matter which concerns us all. Extinction is forever. When a species becomes extinct, it is a loss for both the world and for Canada. Anyone who cares about maintaining healthy ecosystems for future generations must by extension care about endangered species.

In Canada, known throughout the world for the richness of our wilderness areas, the preservation of our animals, birds and plant life is akin to the preservation of our national identity. We have a tendency to think that species extinction is someone else's problem. However, the truth is that since the arrival of Europeans, at least eight of our distinct animal species and at least one population of caribou have become extinct.