

Government Orders

process to define criteria and indicators that will be a scientific and technical basis for measuring our progress toward our goal of sustainable forest management.

In addition, Canada is actively participating in an international process to define criteria and indicators for temperate and boreal forests. During the past year Canada has cohosted with Malaysia the intergovernmental working group on forests to help determine the future path for international sustainable forest management. This will contribute to the work of the United Nations Commission for Sustainable Development as it reviews progress toward the goals agreed to at the UNCED".

I absolutely recognize, contrary to my friend in the Bloc, that there is a place for a Canadian natural resources department, particularly as it relates to international trade and international issues.

In the area of communication, the recommendation from our clear cut committee was that the federal government, in conjunction with the provinces and territories, industry, environmentalists, and other stakeholders, strive to consolidate the communication strategies currently employed in international markets into a single and effective campaign to promote Canada's forest management practices abroad.

The response by the minister was supportive of that. Her department says the Government of Canada agrees with this recommendation and recognizes that foreign customers, retailers, and nations are seeking assurances that the forest products they purchase originate from sustainably managed forests.

With 50 per cent of Canada's forest products being exported, the economic health—

• (1720)

The Deputy Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Len Taylor (The Battlefords—Meadow Lake, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a brief question. In the interest of time, brevity is important.

I listened to the hon. member's speech with a great deal of interest. He spent 20 minutes on a wide range of subjects, some of which I am quite grateful for the interventions that the member made. I understand he supports the bill just as I do, but I did not hear anything in his speech about why he supports the bill. I wonder if he might briefly give us some indication why the legislation in front of us—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Kootenay East.

Mr. Abbott: Mr. Speaker, I apologize because unfortunately I did not see any signal from the Speaker so I did go over the time. My apologies.

In response to the member, the main reason I support the bill is because I believe, in terms of the consolidation of the departments and the way in which the bill has been put together, it will create efficiencies.

My major concern however is that we make sure the Department of Natural Resources at the federal level does not encroach on other levels of government. As a matter of fact we should be looking to efforts, as I have suggested, to divest the natural resources department at the federal level of some of its control and give it to the provinces.

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to Bill C-48, a bill that reorganizes the Department of Natural Resources.

The issue of natural resources is very important to my constituents in Kindersley—Lloydminster. Primary industries form almost the entire economy of west central Saskatchewan and are affected by this department or by the department of agriculture. Agriculture is also a natural resource.

Within my riding there are two potash mines, the Cory mine near Delisle and the Cominco mine near Vanscoy. There are also two Domtar salt mines, one near Biggar and the other at Unity. I have a vibrant oil and gas industry within my constituency, as well as the controversial government megaproject, the heavy oil upgrader at Lloydminster. The majority of my constituency is involved in the greatest natural resource of all, agriculture.

I have included agriculture as a natural resource even though it is traditionally thought of as separate from the other primary industries and perhaps is not affected by Bill C-48. It is appropriate in today's tough fiscal climate to reconsider the role of government in the lives of those working in primary industries. After all, this sector is the primary stimulus of all other economic activities.

Currently Canada's primary industries are divided into three categories by the federal government. There is agriculture and agri-food, fisheries and oceans, and then mining, forestry, oil and gas, atomic energy and other energy sources grouped together in the Ministry of Natural Resources. As the direct role of government in these industries decreases it may be time to consider an administrative merger of these departments.

It is worth while to consider that most of the provinces also have these three departments. Once we can agree which of these responsibilities are federal and which fall within provincial jurisdiction it will be easier to avoid duplication of effort. This will lead to less bureaucracy and may facilitate a merger of the federal ministries at considerable savings for Canadians.